



Handbook of good practice in the management of the academic studies and pastoral care of international Master students

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Association for European Life Science Universities

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1 Introduction

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Recent developments in European higher education such as those stimulated by the Bologna process and the introduction of double, multiple or joint Master degree programmes have enhanced the ability of European universities to compete effectively in the global education market place. In this scenario, there is an increasing competition between universities to attract the best students, both national and international, to the Master degree programmes. Successful Master degree programmes play an important role in the global competition as an indicator of quality and are a successful basis from which to attract the best students to Doctorate degree programmes.

The challenge with the development of degree programmes designed to attract international Master students is to design programmes to meet their expectations, to take account of and benefit from their varying cultural background and experience, and often to support their adaptation to a very different approach to learning. It is also necessary to ensure that they quickly adapt to their new environment of a foreign country and a new university. These issues are compounded if the student has selected a degree programme taught at more than one university (a multiple or joint degree programme), requiring the students to move during their degree programme between universities.

It is important to recognise in university planning that there is much diversity amongst international students. Each international student must be seen as an individual who has his or her own particular challenges, probably more than the national students who come from a similar cultural background. The following quote is particularly apt:

“I am not an international student, I am Puerto Rican as my friends are Chinese, Indonesians, Ghanaian, Mexican, Russian, Polish and from other countries. The only thing we have in common is that we all are foreigners in this country. I would have expected an international university to be aware of all of these differences but here they assume foreigner students are all the same.”
(quoted by Jeanine Herman, 2005).

This Handbook addresses the issues in the management of a Master degree programme designed to meet the expectations of international Master students. An international

student is defined as a student who is not a national of the country in which the degree programme is delivered. The international students can be from other European countries or from other continents. The Handbook addresses both the academic management of the degree programme and also the pastoral care of the student from first enquiry through to preparation for departure on graduation. At the end of each chapter there is a checklist of questions which will assist in addressing the issues raised.

The Handbook has been developed as part of the AMEU project to enhance the attractiveness of Master programmes at European universities in agriculture, the applied life science and the rural environment and has been funded by the European Commission. The AMEU project carried out a survey of universities to identify good practice in the academic and pastoral care on care of international students. The results of the survey were used to inform the development of this Handbook. Alongside the authors of this Handbook Ewa Bienkowska-Mochtak, Warsaw University of Life Sciences and Eduardo Rosa, University of Trás os Montes and Alto Douro contributed to the development of the survey. The AMEU project also developed a quality assurance framework of benchmarks and indicators with which to evaluate the success of Master degree programmes designed for international students (Steen, Cobb and Heath 2008). These benchmarks and indicators have also informed the development of this Handbook.

References

- Hermans, J. (2005) *The X-factor - internationalisation with a small 'c'*. In Calderón-Peter M and Heath S B (Eds). *Providing our graduates with a global perspective through real and virtual student exchange*, Interuniversity Consortium for Agricultural and Related Sciences in Europe, Belgium.
- Steen, J, Cobb, A H and Heath S B (2008) *The AMEU Framework for the quality assurance of international Master degree programmes delivered by a single European life science university*. Association for European Life Science Universities, Belgium.

2 Academic management of your Master degree programme – needs, aims and learning outcomes

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Introduction

The first step to consider when designing an international Masters degree programme are the needs and demands of the stakeholders, the students and their future employers, and not rely only on supply side factors, like the university staff's specialisations. It is then important to translate these needs into clearly defined learning outcomes before designing the necessary knowledge and competences paths to fulfil them. With the goal to attract the best international students, the aims and learning outcomes of the international Master degree programme should be innovative, attractive and with the potential to develop competences in the students which are in demand for future employment.

Needs and aims

The Master degree programme should be designed from the *demand side* rather than the *supply side*. Academics often overestimate the importance of their fields of specialisation in relation to the needs of students. To avoid this trap, the international Master should be designed following a thorough analysis of the stakeholder needs and the career prospects of the graduates. The stakeholders include the prospective students, recent graduates, government, commerce, NGOs and the general societal needs. Identification of the needs of stakeholders is not easily achieved, techniques include surveys, tracking the career paths of alumni, focus group discussions with key players. Obviously, when developing a Master programme designed to attract international students the stakeholders should have a perception of the international needs in their specific field. These needs may not be similar in all circumstances with the result that a degree programme may need to target particular regions of the world or particular commercial situations. The Master degree programme designer should be able to demonstrate that the views and needs of the stakeholders have been taken account of in the design of the degree programme.

The aims of an international Master should be innovative, address real needs and be up to date in addressing the current developments in the sciences and the application of the science in practice. Academics should attempt to forecast the needs of the employment sectors in the next five to ten years in order to provide well-trained graduates who will be in demand in the market place. An attractive international Master degree programme must inspire the imagination of prospective students and employers if it is to be successful.

It is also important to design the international Master in a way that the aims and outcomes are relevant for employment in the international market place and not only the national one. One of the reasons for the brain drain experienced by some countries, who send their graduates to universities in the developed world, is related to the fact that the competences students acquire from the Master degree programmes are only relevant for employment in the developed countries of the world. This forces the Master graduate to search for a job in those countries rather than returning to their home country.

Knowledge and benchmarking of competing international Master degree programmes is essential. On a global scale there is an increasing competition among universities offering international Master degree programmes. It is thus important to benchmark the "home" Master degree programme with the most successful competitors so as to be able to define the competitive advantage and added value of the "home" degree programme. The benchmarking will also enable the review of the "home" degree programme and identify opportunities for enhancement.

Learning outcomes

Having defined the aim of the degree programme the next step is to plan the curriculum. The curriculum should be planned by defining the learning outcomes to be achieved by the degree programme level, and broken down to the learning outcomes to be achieved by each course or module within the degree programme. Learning outcomes are statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. They are usually expressed as knowledge, skills or attitudes and describe a desired condition – that is, the knowledge, skills, or attitudes needed to fulfil the defined need (Phillips, 1994).

Learning outcomes have three distinguishing characteristics:

- the specified action by the learners must be observable
- the specified action by the learners must be measurable
- the specified action must be done by the learners.

The learning outcomes must be expressed with active verbs demonstrating what the student is expected to know and be able to do, for example use verbs like explain, create, design, analyse, synthesise, describe and compare. Verbs such as know,

become aware of, appreciate, learn, understand do not define what the student will be able to do as a result of successfully completing a module, course and the degree programme.

The learning outcomes which define a Master degree programme have been defined by the Dublin Descriptors in relation to those descriptors for Bachelor and Doctorate degree programmes. These descriptors have been accepted throughout the European Higher Education Area. Master degrees are awarded to students who have achieved the following learning outcomes, typically students will be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
- apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
- integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;
- communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; and
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

A clear definition of the aims and learning outcomes is also necessary in every course or module included in the Master degree programme to assure the overall coherence of the courses and modules in the overall curriculum, and to avoid overlap or repetition in different subjects. It should be possible to demonstrate how the expected learning outcomes build from the initial courses to the learning outcomes of the whole degree programme.

A good practice to help with this topic is to write a fiche for each course/module with:

- a clear description of the aims and the learning outcomes of the course/module
- previous knowledge requirements in order to participate in the course/module
- how the course/module contributes to the Master degree programme
- subjects related with to the course/module
- the expected time to be devoted to the different activities within the course/module
- assessment methods

An important consideration, when defining the learning outcomes of an international Master, is to take account of the issues arising from the cultural diversity of the

students and the need to prepare students for a career in a multicultural environment. Such aspects include multicultural communication; cultural exchange; creation of favourable multicultural working environment; and valuing the personal experience of each student.

Academic staff involved in delivering an international Master degree programme should have international experience in research and development in their field, and hopefully also in their teaching. This experience comes from involvement in international projects, working in international environments, and coming to terms with working in different cultures. This experience will give them the necessary skills in dealing with the issues of cultural diversity, and give them credibility in addressing the learning outcomes of a degree programme designed to meet the needs of international students.

Checklist

- Do you seek input in the development of the degree programme from all international stakeholders, such as Government, employers or funding bodies, NGO's? How are their needs known?
- Are the educational objectives consistent with the needs of stakeholders?
- Are the educational objectives relevant for international students?
- Are the learning outcomes consistent with the Dublin Descriptors for a Master degree programme?
- Is an international perspective evident in the programme learning outcomes?

Reference

Phillips, L. (1994) *The Continuing Education Guide: The CEU and Other Professional Development Criteria*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub., 1994.

3 Academic management of your Master degree programme – teaching and learning

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Introduction

Curriculum planning and execution of an international Masters degree programme requires consideration of the special needs of international students with regard to both the academic content and in the administration of the programme. From the student's perspective aspects such as academic performance, counseling and class group inclusion mechanisms are key. On the lecturer's side, support is needed to deal with the challenges derived from teaching and assessing in an international environment. Special attention should be devoted to promote awareness and take advantage of the cultural diversity.

Curriculum planning

Having defined the learning outcomes the next step is to define the curriculum in order to achieve the learning outcomes. The curriculum should build from the initial courses to the completion of the degree programme. Curriculum planning should allow for flexibility and the facility to adapt the curriculum so as to be responsive to new developments in the science and its application in practice. Flexibility also allows the degree programme to be resilient in responding to checks caused by, for example, changing demand by students, the removal of grant schemes, or competition from new but similar degree programmes at other universities. One example of how to build in flexibility is to organise short courses or seminars (1-2 credits under the European Credit Transfer System, ECTS) in which academics report the results of recent research in their specialisation. Those seminars can be updated year by year, both the topic and the presenter, so as to allow up to date issues to be presented to the students. Such changes can be made without the need for formal and often lengthy university curriculum planning procedures. Another strategy can be to include practitioners with experience and expertise in the topics in the planning and teaching of the Master degree programme. This strategy increases the links between academia and the professional world, helping to guarantee the usefulness of the acquired knowledge at practical level.

The universities delivering Master degree programmes designed to attract international students must address the benefits and challenges associated with cultural diversity, particularly multicultural communication and cross-cultural exchanges. In addition, traditional approaches to teaching and learning can differ widely among universities and countries, particularly when viewed on a global scale. International students coming from a variety of countries may come to a university in Europe with very different expectations for the teaching and learning process, ranging from formal didactic teaching with little informal contact with their lectures to heavy reliance on problem based learning. The teaching staff must be aware of the consequences of this diversity and develop their teaching to take account of this diversity so as to ensure that all students achieve their potential.

Addressing the needs of the international student

Students from different countries may face academic challenges linked to their approach to teaching and learning, language difficulties, educational background (e.g. assessment and evaluation methods, tutoring system, and academic rules) and cultural background (e.g. behaviour inside and outside the classroom, relationship to academic and administrative staff). International students do not come from one common background but from a range of cultural backgrounds, each student's particular circumstances needs to be considered and appropriate support given. The approaches taken should have the aim of the successful inclusion of each student in the classroom leading to successful completion of the degree programme. Actions in different domains can be taken to:

a) Support academic performance

- Devote time in an intensive introduction course to familiarise students with the university's teaching methods, the expected approach by the student to learning, and the assessment methods.
- Develop active learning techniques to encourage participation and inclusion. International students will often have only experienced traditional didactic teaching techniques; lectures listening to teachers, memorizing concepts and answering examinations. An international Master programme should force students to be much more proactive in their learning. This can be achieved through student centred learning approaches which force students to be participative, to discuss critically, to apply their knowledge, to use their previous experience in the learning process and, finally, to reflect on what they are learning.
- Encourage the use of diverse teaching approaches and methods to facilitate the performance of students with different skills and abilities.
- Allocate sufficient time for self learning, recognising that student centred learning approaches require more time for gaining the information and ideas than traditional didactic teaching, but importantly will develop high level competences that are not achieved by didactic teaching.

- Support the continuing evaluation of the work leading to the publication of a Master thesis. For instance, Master colloquium sessions open to both academic staff and all the thesis students allowing each Master student to report on the design, results and evaluation of the outcomes of the research project helps students to test the standard of their work as it progress and before the final evaluation of the thesis.
- Support students for whom it transpires that they do not have adequate prerequisite knowledge in certain subjects, this could include language training.
- Consider translating some of the teaching materials into other languages.
- Introduce case studies or examples from the students' countries, where possible. This is crucial to make students feel confident about the applicability of the acquired knowledge in the Master degree to issues in their home country reality.
- Introduce comparative approaches to give the students the opportunity to contribute from their own experience. Quite often international students have an interesting experience or expertise in the topic of the Master degree programme which they can share with their classmates and teacher.
- Integrate national students in international classrooms. Frequently, international Master degree programmes have difficulty in attracting national students, especially when they are taught in a foreign language (mainly in English). National students often take a parochial national approach and are not attracted to an international Master programmes addressing the topic on a global basis. Secondly, even if they are aware of the importance of mastering foreign languages, national students are often afraid of failing or performing poorly due to language problems. Effort should be made to demonstrate to national students the benefits of an international Master degree programme for both careers at home and in the global market place.
- Adopt one-to-one approach with all the students.
- Help with the development some necessary skills which are inadequate, for example the topics could include self learning, information seek tools, and the use of scientific data bases, through individual counselling, workshops, seminars.
- Provide extra consultations or adapted teaching materials when necessary.

b) Actions linked to academic counselling

- Have trained staff who can recognise and relate to the academic problems likely to be experienced by international students.
- Provide tutors or study advisors to discuss on a one to one basis to address each student's personal situation, adaptation problems or difficulties related to academic performance. Some universities have introduced the position of an Academic Assessor to fulfil these functions.

- Have monitoring meetings to check the suitability of lectures, seminars and student centred learning approaches for the international students.

c) Actions linked to the inclusion and belonging of the international students to the class group:

- Encourage participation and interaction between members of the class group, in the class room and outside. The first two months can be very challenging for international students, since they face many unfamiliar challenges and can be homesick. Furthermore, people from some cultures can be very shy or not used to public speaking and putting their point of view. Introductory lectures in which students can introduce themselves, their previous experience, their interests and their expectations from following the Master degree programme can help to break the ice and lead to inclusion in the class group. Some Master degree programmes also ask students to prepare a presentation of the situation relating to the Master topic in their country. If common presentation format is provided for the presentations, it will be possible to easily compare the issues in the different countries, better identification of common problems or situations, improved understanding of the class mates' home countries, and help break any barriers to interaction between class members at the start of the course.
- Introduce conflict solving mechanisms in the classroom: for example, quite often students from the same country may present very different visions of the same topic in their country or students disagree on hot topics (water conflicts, border conflicts, international trade barriers). An open and assertive approach from the academics is necessary to avoid conflict and to establish an open climate in the classroom that allows analysing the problems from different perspectives without excessive tensions.

Addressing the needs of the lecturer

Lecturers contributing to the delivery of an international Master degree programme may need to adapt and develop in order to be successful in this new environment. Many of the international Master degree programmes in Europe are delivered in English forcing the lecturers to teach in a foreign language where often they feel inhibited in expressing themselves effectively. In addition, they may need to broaden their understanding of their subject to encompass a more international perspective in order to meet the needs and expectations of the international students. In addition they will have to address and manage multicultural issues in the classroom.

Actions to address these issues include:

- Designing tailor-made language courses for staff (not traditional university language courses that require academics to sit alongside students) dealing with

their specific needs such as technical vocabulary and lack of confidence in communicating in a foreign language.

- Providing support with the translation of teaching materials (e.g. powerpoint presentations, lecture notes and exercises).
- Attracting staff from other countries or other university with international experience lacking in the home university. These staff can be permanent, or long-term and short term visiting professors that spend some time lecturing in the university. In doing so they pass on their experience to the home university staff, thus providing staff development. The cost of hiring these staff can be defrayed by grants, for example Socrates-Erasmus staff mobility scheme to promote academic mobility, and the Spanish Ministry of Education's call to invite visiting professors to teach in quality awarded Master and Doctorate programmes.
- Providing staff development courses to skill the lecturers in delivering a lecture in an international classroom. Topics include how to present in a foreign language, how to manage the teaching and learning process so as to reduce the need to speak in a foreign language, how to manage multicultural issues so as to successfully develop a participative and contributory learning environment for all the students in the class group.

Assessment of learning outcomes

Assessment should not be considered as an end on itself, but as a means to improve the learning process. The assessment should be designed to test the achievement of the learning outcomes which are broadly defined by the Dublin Descriptors for international Master degree programmes. Because of the diversity in the learning outcomes it will be necessary to include a range of assessment instruments from formal written examinations, short essays, thesis and oral examinations.

Assessment requires attention not only to assessment of the final outcomes but also monitoring progress throughout each course/module and the whole degree programme. Continuous assessment at various points during the process allows students to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they might improve their outcomes. Prompt feed-back by the lecturers is essential if the students are to benefit and have time to respond to the continuous assessment.

The overall success of all the students on each course/module and for the whole degree programme can be a useful indicator for enhancing the delivery of the degree programme.

Course and programme assessment methods

Grading scales can widely differ among countries. To clearly understand the meaning of the scores is crucial to make students comfortable with the learning systems. ECTS

system intends to overcome the diversity of grading scales existing in Europe and to relate them to a single scale. However, the system is not yet fully understood or broadly adopted. Some ECTS scores (C and D) can lead to bad employment expectations when the students return to their countries. This should not be the case, C grade represents: *Good - generally good work with a number of notable errors* and grade D represents: *Satisfactory - fair but with significant shortcomings*.

To make students more familiar with the assessment methods, most universities will explain the criteria underlying the existing university grading scales and relate the university scale to the ECTS scale. In addition, the Diploma Supplement will include a more comprehensive explanation of the meaning of the different marks.

When a Master degree programme is delivered by more than one university the different grading scales used by the different universities may lead to bias in the grading due to different grading traditions. For example some universities rarely use the top of the scale while for others it is common practice. To avoid unequal treatment of students homogenisation methods are necessary. It is important to calculate equivalences based on a common scale, e.g. on the ECTS percentages scale or other models, in order to introduce some corrections to the final score. Overtime the confidence in the relationship between the different scales increases when the marks of successive cohorts of students are used to evaluate the relationship between scales.

Guidance in the learning process

Language support

Students require a good knowledge of the teaching language if they are to successfully achieve a Master degree. Many international Master degree programmes in Europe are taught in English, but others preserve the country language in the teaching, e.g. French, German or Spanish. The entry requirements for an international Master degree programme require proof of adequate language proficiency. However, not with standing these worldwide recognised language tests, it transpires on arrival that many students lack the language proficiency to follow the lectures. Even if students master the language, different accents (like Asians or Africans) can create communication difficulties in group discussions and can lead to failure or only limited integration in the class group.

International Master degree programmes should be able to offer students language training facilities such as:

- intensive language courses
- summer courses (before the start of the teaching period)
- language labs
- personal coaching to help with editing documents

- scientific language courses dealing with the topic of the Master
- internships with local families or commercial companies
- supply of teaching materials and bibliography in English when the Master is taught in another language

Expected behaviour in relation to learning in and outside the classroom

Different cultures have different accepted ways for the interaction between staff and students. This can range from very formal and distant treatment to rather informal relations, for instance the staff are called only by the first name rather Dr Smith. Lectures can range from being interactive and participative to very formal presentations with no verbal interaction between staff and students. Unapproachable lecturers can inhibit students from seeking help before it is too late. On the opposite hand, lecturers who adopt a too familiar relationship can create difficulties for themselves if the students do not show adequate respect.

Failure to understand and adopt the cultural norms of the country can challenge international students and prevent them from fully integrating. Actions should be taken to avoid unacceptable behaviour or to make students know how they are expected to behave. The most common action is to familiarise students on the teaching methods and expected behaviour in the university in the Master introductory courses.

Tutoring on an academic level

Quite often international students feel disoriented or lost when arriving in another country and at a new university. Their academic performance will be highly dependent on the ability to understand, to get proper advice and then to make the right course choices in an environment that normally is quite different from the one they come from. They need to have an academic tutor or a scientific coordinator ready to guide them.

It is difficult for their needs to be addressed if they are advised by a person who has responsibility for a large number of students and does not have time to devote to students on a one to one basis. Best practice is to:

- to assign the student to a personal academic tutor who is responsible for only a very limited number of students,
- to adopt a one-to-one approach to tutoring the students rather than group tutoring
- to implement a follow-up system, where twice or three times a semester students can discuss their progress and possible problems with an academic tutor.

For the benefit of the academic tutor and the student it is essential to clearly establish the role of the tutors, the maximum number of students assigned that can be assigned to them, and their availability.

Academic procedural rules at the university

Every university has specific procedural rules at the academic level that should be made clear to international students from the start of their studies. General information about these aspects should be easily available to all the students to allow them to take their own decisions during the study period.

Sometimes, universities use students' guides, students' charters, information books to disseminate this information. Others explain these rules during the introductory courses. It is best practice to adopt a combination of these two approaches, it is essential to have the information written down and accessible, but there is also a need to explain the key elements to the students. The student should know who to approach to get the definitive explanation of the rules as the rules have a legal consequence with regard to the award of the Master degree.

Challenges related to cultural diversity

Often cultural diversity is not considered as an advantage, but as an additional burden in the management of the class. Different issues need to be addressed like language, social aspects (for example gender discrimination, religious topics, and ethnic aspects), academic aspects (for example classroom behaviour, respect of rules, student-teacher relationships), values (for example hierarchy, taboos, perceived status, motivations). However, cultural diversity can bring benefits to the classroom and the delivery of the degree programme. Proactive and positive approaches are necessary to take full advantage of the positive aspects.

Promoting awareness of cultural diversity issues in the classroom

Cultural differences in the classroom, if properly managed can end in a multicultural learning environment. However, it is also very possible to end in a battlefield, where students' origins and backgrounds lead to significant conflicts. The reality of developing understanding and inclusiveness between the different students in the group is not an easy task. A first step should be to develop cultural integrative solutions that enhance internal cohesion and common respect of the others. To achieve this it is important to make students understand the existing cultural diversity and the advantages that can derive from it.

Some actions to this understanding:

- organise workshops on intercultural communication during the orientation week, see chapter 7.
- present and discuss the approach to different cultural topics in students different countries with the participation of national students
- organise cultural awareness seminars

- address cultural differences from sociological perspectives
- ask the students to prepare presentations on different issues in their countries and to share their views with their classmates
- organise working groups and case studies with students from different countries
- foster the cross-exchange of experiences among all the students
- organise activities involving people from different parts of the world.

The described activities are also very useful to increase cultural diversity awareness among the national students that quite often have narrower views than international students.

Taking advantages of the cultural diversity

Learning from and managing cultural diversity is not an easy task. However, an increasing number of universities are recognising the importance of taking cultural diversity into account, and are developing new ways of governance, teaching and administration for the benefit of the university as a whole (Hermans, 2005).

Important competences in managing cultural diversity, which are so important in working in an increasingly globalised and interdependent world, need to be developed by students. Such skills as diversity recognition, tolerance, respectful dialogue and cultural understanding are vital for the coming years.

Some activities which can be included in the academic courses of the Master degree curriculum in order to develop the cultural diversity competences include:

- organising joint group discussions and problem solving sessions
- stimulating the sharing of work and personal experiences amongst the students
- providing training in conflict management
- promoting staff training on these topics
- recruiting international staff.

Checklist

- Does the curriculum ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes?
- How do you ensure that students maximise the benefit of the international dimension of the degree programme?
- How does the strategy of teaching and learning achieve the learning outcomes?
- How is it assured that students enrolled on the programme have the knowledge and attitude to achieve the learning outcomes in the expected time?
- How has the learning and teaching strategy considered the cultural background of international students, plagiarism, independent learning, language skills, academic pre-requisite knowledge?

- How have the learning and teaching strategies used generated added value from delivering the programme internationally?
- How has the assessment process been designed to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes?
- How are international students informed of and given guidance in assessment and grading procedures?
- Is academic counselling offered to students to support their achievement of the learning outcomes?
- How are the special needs of international students accommodated?

Reference

Hermans, J. (2005) *The X-factor - internationalisation with a small 'c'*. In Calderón-Peter M and Heath S B (Eds), *Providing our graduates with a global perspective through real and virtual student exchange*, Interuniversity Consortium for Agricultural and Related Sciences in Europe, Belgium.

4 Promoting your university's Master degree programmes

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Introduction

Proactive promotion of a Master degree programme is expensive and every effort should be made to obtain a good return on the investment through successful student recruitment. There are two main issues to address, identifying and reaching the target audience, and secondly developing the appropriate information (advertising) materials.

How to identify the potential target audiences for the degree programme

With ever increasing worldwide competition for students it is important to identify the added value provided by the degree programme over competitive degree programmes worldwide. Through such a review it will be possible to define the market niche and thus the key targets for the promotional campaign. This can best be carried out through a SWOT analysis, identifying the internal strengths and weaknesses of the degree programme, and the external opportunities and threats. Such an analysis clearly defines the product that is being marketed and its target group(s).

The market niche may come from focusing on the needs of students from a particular region, or from addressing global issues in the context of a particular region or country. The market advantage may also come from the particular skills and expertise of the host university staff in addressing an international subject, such as biotechnology, or global issues.

After making the decision on the choice of target group the co-ordinator of the Master degree programme should record it formally in the university's appropriate planning document so that all responsible for marketing the university's degree programmes are aware of the target for the degree programme.

How to reach the target audience?

Having defined the target audience it is then necessary to decide on how best to reach the students. Where are the students most likely to first encounter your degree programme? Consider the life styles of your potential students, with whom or what do they interact with when seeking information on future opportunities for further study?

Methods of promotion

- website – this is the most obvious and the first necessary step in promoting Master degree programmes. However, this is a passive way of spreading information – only students interested in a particular university will check its offer on a web site. There are some websites where the student can search for a degree programme, for example these include the *EU Ploteus search engine* and the *ICA Portal for Master and Doctorate Degree Programmes in Agricultural and Related Sciences*. However, if the Master Programme is new or does not attract enough applications from students, more proactive approaches to marketing should be combined with the supply information through Internet.

Members of established networks can actively assist in the promotion of the degree programme. Such contacts, being based on long term cooperation and confidence, are extremely valuable in promoting a degree programme and are inexpensive. These can be particularly effective as the people in the network are likely to be in direct contact with the potential students. Networking can come through

- past cooperation in funded programmes – for example Tempus, Socrates, EU-US programme, EU's Asia Link programme
- historical regional co-operation between countries – for example Baltic States, Visegrad 4 (V4 states, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia)
- historical connections, for example from past colonial university links
- scientific and commercial interests, for example resulting from similar climatic conditions - for example International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)
- research networks
- alumni networks

Other approaches include:

- identifying a link person in the region/country – who can advise on the universities to contact and who can provide contact persons at the universities
- sending information to identified contact persons at these universities. However, there is a danger that the booklets and information packages are just put on a shelf and are not disseminated widely in the university. There is also the possibility of disseminating information through student associations at

these universities – for example through the local group of the International Association of Students in Agriculture and Related Sciences (IAAS)

- promotion through organisations providing scholarships to students, for example from developing countries
- disseminate information through national organisations (for example the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic), British Council, EduFrance or embassies)
- educational fairs and exhibitions – these are examples of more proactive promotion methods, but they are both costly and time consuming
- engagement of a link organisation to promote the Master programmes – this again is likely to be expensive and the effectiveness of the organisation should be evaluated before engagement.
- information package given to visitors to the home university, returning exchange students, travelling academic staff, promotion during scientific and specialised events (scientific symposiums, conferences, seminars and workshops) etc.

General rules in preparing information materials

When preparing promotional materials it is necessary to keep in mind the rules that apply to effective marketing as the aim is to launch a product into educational market place. Remember, that as there are many offers at the educational market in a particular discipline and several may be quite similar, it is crucial to draw attention to the innovative and added value elements of the degree programme. Also consider the implications of the cultural background of the target audience and the language of the students. It is good practice to involve students in the design of the marketing materials to ensure the appeal of the materials. For example a promotion DVD about the host university prepared with the help of students will have a completely different character than a film prepared by academic or administrative staff.

Information materials must be clear, explicit as well as eye catching. It is necessary to consider what detail of information is provided in the various promotional documents. For example the balance between the information presented in a flyer designed to attract interest compared with the information which can be provided cheaply and easily updated on the degree programme website. Through the various information channels the following information must be available from the home country of the potential international Master students.

- title and aims of the Master degree programme
- concept of the degree programme and career expectations for graduates
- learning outcomes for the degree programme and each course
- core courses and optional courses in the Master degree programme
- description of the content of each course

- admission criteria and procedures
- information on grant or scholarship opportunities
- academic timetable including examination dates
- the semester timetable

Information materials must be available in the language of instruction of the Master degree programme, but also can be prepared in the mother tongue of incoming students as this personal approach can be encouraging. There should be a continuous review of the promotional materials. In-coming Master students should be asked where they first encountered the promotional materials, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the promotional materials, and what were their reasons for selecting the particular Master degree programme in comparison with others on offer.

Checklist

- What are unique selling points of the Master degree programme – the product being marketed? What are the niche markets for the degree programme?
- Who are the principle target audiences? For what reasons have these audiences been targeted?
- Where will these students most likely first encounter information about the Master degree programme? Is the relevant information about the degree programme available at this point of first contact?
- For what reasons have the different methods of marketing been chosen? For what reasons were the other marketing channels disregarded?
- What information needs to be provided?
- Which information needs to be provided in the varying marketing materials?
- Are the marketing materials attractive and providing relevant and explicit information?
- Is there a process in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the different approaches to marketing the Master degree programme?

5 Selection of international Master students

Agnieszka Wojciechowska

Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland

Introduction

The selection of high quality candidates for international Master's students is essential for the success of the degree programme. It is necessary to establish selection procedures that are critical and transparent. The aims of such procedures is to prevent problems arising from selecting students who lack the motivation, or who are not capable of following the Master degree programme successfully due to a lack of pre-requisite knowledge or insufficient competence in the language in which the degree programme is delivered. Problems of lack of knowledge or inadequate language skills are not only demotivating for the student, as it may result in exam failure and social exclusion, but it can also have an adverse effect on the whole group of students in such activities as team working.

What is the most efficient way of assessing the applications of international Master's students?

The following documentation are central to the process of assessing applications:

- the student's CV and application
- the transcript of the academic records of a candidate, which should be translated into the language chosen by the host university as the working language of application procedure, and which should be confirmed by the home university;
- the confirmation of appropriate knowledge of the instruction language – it should be proved either by an internationally recognised certificate or a document issued by a qualified unit at a host university.

Such documents will be supported by a reference letters from academics who have taught the student. However, unfortunately the use of these documents does not a guarantee the successful selection of well prepared students able to follow the course without language problems.

Sometimes good marks in transcript of records do not correspond with candidate's actual knowledge and do little to provide information on the student's motivation. The

difficulty is to fully relate the grades achieved to a scale recognised by the university selecting the student. It is advisable to find a separate reference point for assessing the candidate's achievements – one such way is to request a one page proposal for a Master research project including the title, objectives and general description of the research project. This would help to find highly motivated and involved students, give insight into their understanding of the subject area and test their language skills. The problem is that the proposal may not be written by the student. Another approach to assessing motivation is to ask the student to outline his/her work experience.

It can happen that, even if candidates submit language certificates meeting the desired score, their real ability to work in the language of instruction is insufficient to allow them to effectively understand and communicate. However, the requirement to provide such proof at least rules out candidates who do not have the required formal recognition of skills in a particular foreign language.

Using ICT or phone interviews for recruiting students are effective ways of enhancing the selection of well qualified students. The direct contact with the candidates, whether through ICT, phone interview or during a meeting in a home organisation, allows for the verification of a candidate's knowledge, motivation and language skills. It is unlikely that it is cost effective to use such an approach to assess all applications, but can be used in the final selection process for students who are on the border line for being accepted. The interviews can be carried out by the appointed staff of the host university, but there is also the possibility of using specialised intermediary agencies to organise recruitment at home universities, for example in China. However, their charges add to the cost of the selection process and it is essential to work with widely recommended agencies.

As in the case of marketing the Master degree programme, long-established collaboration between universities, the university hosting the degree programme and the home university of the student, greatly enhances confidence in the selection of appropriately qualified students. This improved confidence can come from the possibility to contact colleagues in the student's home university for certification of the application documents, having greater confidence in the reliability of the reference letters and the possibility to contact the colleague directly by email or telephone. Even better, if the host university academic staff visit the home university to give lectures or to participate in joint research projects, there is then the possibility to interview the student face to face.

How can the authenticity of the application documents be checked?

In most of the cases the application documents are genuine, but there is always the possibility that they have been falsified. In order to avoid problems with applicants who are insufficiently prepared for a particular international Master degree programme

or can pose a serious threat to the legal or security system of the host country, the authenticity of the documents should be checked.

There are many possibilities and the choice of the most appropriate one depends on the way the selection of international Master degree programme students is organised at host university.

The verification of documents can be done:

- by setting the control process at the central level. However, the procedure and reference points should be well documented to avoid basing the verification standard on individual's experience or intuition
- by setting the control process of at the faculty level. However, again the procedure and reference points must also be well described and unified within the host organisation, otherwise the skills of assessors could have to strong influence on the results of verification
- by setting the process control at the Master degree programme level. Whilst at this level the academic staff involved with have great expertise in the discipline they do not have the experience in validating the transcript that a central process will have.
- by relying on information provided by state administration of either the host or home country, for example a national credential evaluation organisation

It is often the case that the initial screening will be done by the university at the central level and the findings are given to the Faculty or the degree programme co-ordinator in order to make the final selection. In this way the expertise at the centre in validating transcripts is used plus the discipline expertise at the degree programme level.

There are also organisations specialising in promoting international Master's programmes among foreign students and assisting in the selection process. It is an advisable solution, but depends on the available funds.

Checklist

During the selection process you should consider:

- Are the admission requirements for the degree programme clearly stated?
- How does the selection process ensure that the student enrolled on the degree programme have the pre-requisite knowledge, language capability and attitude to achieve the expected learning outcomes in the expected time?
- How effective is the process for assessing the authenticity of the student's application documents?
- Is there an option to interview students on the borderline of being selected – by ICT, phone or during a direct meeting?

- Is it possible to take advantage of existing cooperation with collaborating universities to assist in validating the application?
- Does the selection process respond to the student in a timely and efficient manner?
- Are there established procedures and a timeline for informing the student on the progress of his or her application?

6 Pre-arrival and arrival procedures

Stina-Lena Hellgren

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Introduction

The international student has many hurdles to jump when preparing to enter the foreign country and actually arriving at the university. These range from obtaining the visa for entry, arranging housing, to possibly making arrangements for accompanying persons. Then on arrival the student is faced with often a foreign language, strange signing for directions, and difficulty in making the final step from the airport or train station to the new lodgings. The aim of the university must be to make the steps from pre-arrival to actual arrival as problem free as possible for the international student.

What assistance and information should be given pre-arrival?

Visa procedures

Universities often assist the incoming international Master's student with the visa procedures. To apply for a visa to a country often requires a personal visit of the student to the host countries embassy or consulate in the student's home country but the university can advise and assist the student in preparing the necessary documents.

Accommodation

It is highly recommended that the university should arrange either permanent or temporary accommodation for the international Master student prior to arrival. This is because it is often difficult to find housing in the bigger university cities, and for a student to find housing from abroad is all but impossible. In addition private landlords often require one month rent in advance and for an overseas student this can be difficult and expensive to arrange.

The University of Copenhagen has established a central housing office and they guarantee housing to all international students (non-degree and full-degree students) upon arrival.

Warsaw University of life Science have 3600 places in the dormitories which gives the international student a guarantee of accommodation.

Some universities have set up a separate housing company which assists all students in finding permanent accommodation.

If the university cannot undertake to find permanent accommodation they should at least find temporary housing. This approach has the advantage that the students have accommodation on arrival but then have the freedom to search for the accommodation that best suits their own particular needs and expectations. However, being in temporary accommodation places additional stress on the student in the first weeks on account of the pressure to find permanent accommodation. If the university does not assist the student in finding permanent accommodation then the student should be given a list of accommodation agencies and guidance to appropriate rental information on the internet or paper publications.

Sources of additional income

Many students will wish to augment their scholarships by taking part time work. It is helpful if the university can help the students to find a part-time job either outside and inside the universities.

At the Università della Tuscia in Italy, the international students can participate in a “part-time” paid work programme which involves students in teaching, laboratories at all faculties.

Accompanying persons

In some cases, the international Master student is followed by his or her family (spouse and/or children) to the host university. This raises a lot of new issues for the receiving university. For the visa and other official entry documents it is normal for this to be the responsibility of the Master student. It is very supportive for the student if the Central administration or the International Office assists the Master student in finding family accommodation, schools or nursery for the children, health care and academic courses for the spouse.

Welcoming package

In order to give the international Master's student a warm welcome to the host university and host country, a welcoming package should be sent out before arrival. This can either be a special welcoming package designed for international Master students, or a general information package for all new Master students with additional information only relevant for international Master students. In some cases the Welcoming package is sent out together with the Admission letter.

The welcoming package should consist of

- basic information on living and studying in the host country

- practical information concerning residence permit, banking, health insurance and transportation
- the introduction program/orientation programme
- information about travelling to the host university
- arrival information, bus/train schedules
- maps
- general information about the university and the educational system in the host country
- information about public services
- information about the buddy system – see chapter 8

All EU universities will have produced a welcoming package for incoming Erasmus exchange students and this information can be used as a starting point for developing the information for incoming international Master students. For example the contents of the Gent University *Exchange student guide* has the following chapter heads and could easily be adapted for international Master students:

- **Ghent University:** history, the academic year and examinations, university levels and degrees, faculties, teaching system, assessment and academic recognition
- **preparation of your stay:** Visa, administrative preparation, academic preparation, language preparation, accommodation, insurance
- **arriving in Gent:** transport, registration at the university, registration at the city of Gent, welcome days
- **students services:** libraries, computer and the internet, language courses, advisory centre for students, student registration and curriculum office, health care, disabled students, student jobs, student restaurants, sports, social service and psychological advice emergency centre, international relations office
- **student life @ UGent:** student activities and societies, student organisations for foreign students
- **Gent City:** history of the city, tours and sightseeing, public transport in Gent, shopping, banking, climate, going out, bookshops

What assistance should the university provide at arrival of the international Master student?

It is highly recommended that the university should organise a pick up service for the international student on arrival at the local airport or train or bus station. This can be organised by the international office but can also be carried out by local students often as part of the buddy system (see chapter 8). Most of the students are coming from a country with a different national language and do not understand the national language

and have difficulty in reading the signs and bus timetables. To offer this pick-up service will give them a good start to their stay in their new environment.

The universities should help the international student with the national registration formalities that is needed in the host country. This can either be at the immigration office or with the police registration.

Checklist

- What assistance should be given to the incoming international Master student over and above that given to all national Master students?
- What information do Master students need to receive in a “welcoming pack” prior to arrival at the university? Can the same welcoming pack be used for all Master students, or do the international Master students need additional information?
- Will a pick-up service be offered (either from the airport or the railway/bus station), and if so who will manage the service?

7 Supporting the inclusion of international Master degree students

Stina-Lena Hellgren

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Sweden

Introduction

The international Master student has arrived but now needs to become an active and full integrated member of the university community and feel settled in his or her new environment of town and country. The aim should be for the student to feel fully part of the community within two months of arrival. This applies to all new Master students, but the international student may have more hurdles to jump, for example to effectively exploit the services such as information and communication technology systems of the university and the library, adopt new skills in the approach to learning, adopt different cultural norms and develop multicultural communication skills. To give specific examples, should he address the lecturer as Dr Smith by his familiar name, learn how to work successfully as a team rather than as an individual in completing a project, and how to use online library resources.

The university's first line of support should be an orientation programme at least part of which will be delivered before the start of the degree programme. This will be a programme designed to meet the general needs of the international Master students. However, the international Master student will have many questions and these are often best answered on a one to one basis. This is most cost effectively provided through a buddy system (see Chapter 8). The methods for the successful inclusion of the international Master student must not stop at the end of the orientation programme. There is an ongoing need to develop activities which will encourage the integration of the international students with the national students, it cannot be assumed that this will happen naturally, as all too often the international students stick together and do not integrate with the whole student body.

Orientation Programme

International students arriving in their new country cannot be expected to have the life long experience of the national students and should be assisted to become part of the community as quickly as possible if they are to successfully engage with their degree programme. Consequently many universities deliver an orientation programme which

at the very least aims to inform the incoming Master students about the city, country, and the cultural norms of the university and country. In addition the course deals with practical issues such as the use of the library and information and communications technology (ICT) services. Longer courses can develop skills in the national language, pedagogical and research skills, and multicultural communication skills. The orientation programme can be delivered prior to the start of the first semester or split between a pre semester course and an in semester course. In European universities there are examples of orientation programmes delivered before the start of the degree programme ranging from 1 day to 4 weeks.

At the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences the course last three days and has the following components:

- welcome to SLU
- introduction to Sweden and Uppsala
- guided tour of the campus
- guided tour of Uppsala
- a cultural reflection
- presentation and registration at the Student Union
- information and communication technology (ICT) system at SLU
- Presentation of each student's Master degree programme by the degree programme coordinator in the relevant Department

At the faculty of LIFE at the University of Copenhagen the course last four weeks. The course is designed to meet academic as well as practical needs including topics such as

- an introduction to living in Denmark, official paperwork, language course, the city of Copenhagen, excursions
- an introduction to research methods and pedagogy (problem based learning, project work), university facilities (ICT, library), course registration
- intercultural communication strategies
- networking, academic and social groups

and in 2007 had the following components:

- welcome to LIFE
- guided tour of the LIFE campus, visit to city campus of University of Copenhagen
- guided tour of Danish Parliament
- introduction to Denmark and Danish ways
- Danish film
- Introduction to student networks and associations
- One day excursion
- international dinner

- Danish language lessons (6 sessions)
- studying at LIFE
- Approaches to effective learning, introduction to project work, project work in groups (5 sessions) followed by a presentation and feedback session
- research methods and data handling (2 sessions)
- research ethics (1 session)
- culture meeting and intercultural workshop (3 sessions)
- information and communication technology (ICT) and the library at LIFE
- English placement test
- visit to student's department and presentation of each student's Master degree programme by the degree programme coordinator in the relevant Department

Comparison of the two orientation courses shows that both have introductions to the university, town and country. However, the programme at LIFE sets out to develop learning and research skills which international students may not have developed in their Bachelor degree programmes, in particular project work and team working. The longer LIFE programme also addresses issues surrounding cultural diversity in greater depth than the much shorter SLU programme.

Obviously the four week programme at LIFE provides greater opportunity to address a wide range of topics and in greater depth than a three day course. There are several issues to consider when deciding on the orientation course aims, content and hence the length of the course:

- how will the cost be covered and are staff available to run the course?
- will the students have an extra subsistence grant to enable to arrive four weeks before the actual start of the degree programme? Will the students be charged for the course? Will the students get credits for the course?
- is there too much information being provided when the students are also having to come to terms with getting organised to live and work in a new environment?
- should some of the topics, such as pedagogical and research skills be better addressed in the relevant courses?

It is of course not necessary to provide all the information in an orientation programme at the start of the course. The key question is what do the students need to know before the start of teaching to help ensure that they feel included by the second month of their stay at the university? In addition to possible information overload, a long orientation course may be demotivating when the students are keen to start their academic course, which is the prime motivation for coming to study at the university. As an alternative to a longer orientation course specific events can be arranged throughout the first year to further familiarise the students with their local environment and new country. Ghent University offer such a course in the spring semester, from February to May:

- **A Tour of Flanders** (lecture): a brief introduction to its language and culture, history, universities and society
- **A Basic introduction to the Dutch language**
- **Guided city walk through Gent** and reception by the Mayor of Gent in the Town Hall.
- **The Urban Roots of Medieval Europe**: the contribution of the cities of Flanders
- **Guided visit to SMAK** which owns one of the most important collections of contemporary art in Western Europe
- **The Media in Flanders**
- **Survey of the socio-economic history of Belgium**
- **Belgian gastronomy.**
- **An illustrated introduction to the Flemish writer Louis Paul Boon**
- Screening of the film "Daens" (with English subtitles) based on the book by Boon
- **Population distribution and town and country planning in the Low Countries**
- **The Flemish landscape as seen from above**
- **Flemish Polyphony**
- **The state of Belgium**: a historical accident?
- **Ending life and procreating in Flanders and in the Netherlands**
- **Lecture on the Flemish Economy**
- **Bus excursion** to the countryside.
- **Certificate Awarding Ceremony and reception**

What activities should be provided after the orientation programme?

An orientation programme is just the first step to the integration of an international student within the social environment of the university. It is good practice to organise events and activities which aim to integrate the international students with the national students, and the international students with the local community. Typically these social student events involve a party dressed up in different ways: for example, international dinner, Christmas party, Christmas home visits, outings, barbecues, , and cultural visits. They can also include sport events and language courses.

The university should be prepared to sponsor such events by providing financial support but do not necessarily have to organise them. The event may be organised by a department but here the objective will probably be to encourage good relationships between the staff and students, international relations offices may sponsor events again with the objective of encouraging good relationship between staff and students. Such university sponsored events signal to the international students that the university not only recognises the necessity of taking care of their academic studies but also recognises the value of the time spent in a foreign country for its social and cultural

dimension. However, the most successful events are likely to be organised by the students for the students. This can be through the students union, a local group of an international student organisation or by the buddy system (see chapter 8).

The main problem to be addressed is how to encourage national students to participate in these activities. All too often the parties effectively integrate the international student community by bringing greater understanding of their differing cultural backgrounds but do little to support the integration of the international students with the national students.

The international students might have ideas on their own to organise dinners, exhibitions or excursions. The university through the students union or the buddy system should be prepared to support such initiatives with the provision of facilities and finance. It is a sign of very successful integration when the international students start organising an event which is not only for international students but for the whole university student community.

Providing counselling services for international Master students

All students should have ready access to counselling services, for their well being (mental and physical), and for financial and legal problems (for instance in connection with tenancy disputes). Students require access to the services of medics, psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers, and financial advisers. International Master students need to be aware of who they can approach as the first point of contact to be able to discuss their problem and to be directed to the most appropriate person for further support. The student should have a choice of alternative first contact points as the student might not feel equally comfortable in approaching just one particular person. The first contact point could be the student's tutor, the international office or the medical services.

Whilst these services should be available to all students in the university it is necessary for the staff in these services to be trained in recognising and addressing intercultural issues if they are to fully meet the needs of international students. This training is easier to deliver where the services are provided by staff in house rather than when the services are provided by organisations in the local community. In view of this, it is necessary to include multicultural criteria in the specification brief for the selection of providers for external services.

Checklist

- What are the aims and learning outcomes of the orientation course?
- How will the orientation course be financed and should the students receive credits?

- Will the orientation programme can be delivered prior to the start of the first semester or split between a pre-semester course and an in-semester course?
- Should the university sponsor events and activities after the end of the orientation course to aid inclusion of international students?
- How are staff in the counselling services trained to recognise and address intercultural challenges experienced by students?

8 The Buddy System

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Introduction

A buddy system is best described as a system where an incoming international student is paired up with a local student, who can introduce them to living and studying in the new country. The buddy is first an adviser and often becomes a trusted friend of the international student.. The relationship between them is informal, and not confined to office hours, a relationship probably quite different from the one the international student is likely to have with university staff. Due to this informal relationship the buddy feels able to ask questions about anything and ask for assistance in all kinds of situations, ranging from registration at the university, shopping possibilities, housing, opinions on courses, and most often where the next party is taking place. Thus, a well functioning buddy system can successfully be involved in most parts of the care of international Master students.

This kind of system has the capacity and the capability, through pick-up services, parties, excursions and similar activities, to make the arrival and the first experience in a new country somewhat easier for an international student. The buddy provides the incoming student with an entry to a first network of local and other international students. Such a one to one support on arrival can be crucial to ensuring the successful integration of the international student within his or her new environment and as a consequence the success of the full study period.

How to integrate the buddy system in the university structure?

There are examples of the involvement of a buddy system in all aspects of the care of international students. Most often the buddy programme starts at the time of arrival of the international student and can continue in place throughout the student's stay. However, some pre-arrival tasks can also become the responsibility of the buddy system.

The success of the buddy system depends upon having clearly defined responsibilities and being effectively integrated within the university structure. The buddy system

should not be seen as an add on but as an integral part of the university's system for the care of international students. It is also important that the buddies are given training so that they are aware of the university systems for managing the care of students and particularly the availability of special services for international students.

The buddy system can be responsible for a wide range of tasks, the principle being:

- introduction to the buddy system for local students who may wish to become a buddy
and for the incoming international student
- pre-arrival information on the buddy system
- providing a pick-up service upon arrival at the bus station, train station or airport
- assistance with registration with police or municipality
- assistance in use of the universities facilities e.g. library, computer, fitness centre
- introduction of the Master student to local students and other international students
- arrange events for the international students throughout the period of study for instance parties and excursions

Other tasks which the incoming student will need to complete are normally the responsibility of the staff of the university. These tasks include:

- training for the buddies
- and for the incoming international student
- finding accommodation
- registration at the university
- advice in selecting courses
- registration for the courses
- formal presentations of the culture of the university and locality

The university should identify the responsible person for each of the bullet points above. However, it is clear that the responsible person will not be the only one involved at each step. In many cases the buddy will be involved in an unofficial way, through answering questions on the whole range of the issues listed above, such as the cultural norms of the university, finding the registrars office, opinions on courses. A clear division of responsibilities, as well as a good cooperation, between the buddy system and the university administration well ensure a good experience for the international students.

From the survey examples of the dual role of the university's administration and the buddy system

With the registration at the university it is clear that the university must be involved, but also the buddy system can be involved in guiding the international student to the right place, or even follow them in the office to help with some of the paper work.

In arranging events throughout the study period the buddy system and the international office can work together. The buddy system has the main responsibility for organising most of the events, but there is no hindrance to the international office organising an international evening or something else as long as it is incorporated into the plan of the buddy system.

Checklist

	Considered Who, what and where	Responsibility of the university	Responsibility of the buddy system
Introduction to the buddy system for local students			
Training for the local buddies			
Pre-arrival information on the buddy system			
Finding accommodation			
Pick-up service upon arrival			
Registration at the university			
Registration with police/municipality			
Assistance in use of the universities facilities e.g. library, computer.....			
Advice in selecting courses			
Assistance in registration for courses			
Cultural introduction to the university and locality			
Integration of the international Master students with local students			
Arrange events throughout the period of study i.e. parties, tours			

The role of the buddy system in the stages listed above is likely to vary from university to university. Whatever the responsibilities that are given to the buddy system, it is important that the buddy system is integrated with the university's administration

procedures and that the responsibilities of the different players are clearly set out and known to all participants. It is suggested that a check list similar to the one in the table above is set up.

Should the buddy system be financed?

With responsibility comes money – or at least should come money. It is worth remembering that the time the local students spend on the buddy system is in competition with time spent on earning money in paid student jobs. As a consequence students may be reluctant to join the buddy system if they incur extra expenses and miss out on the opportunity of taking a student job.

Therefore, for an effective and active buddy system some kind of financial support should be given to the buddies, at least the payment of their expenses. Expenses can range from the cost of the trip to the airport to pick-up the international student, paying entrance to museums or support for a weekend trip in the countryside with all the international students and the local buddies. If in addition to the payment of expenses, payment for the time spent or an honorarium will provide extra motivation and can help attract more local students to the buddy system. A well motivated and effective buddy system will give the international students a better experience in integrating into their new country, town and university. The financial cost of a buddy system will depend on the number of international students coming to the university and the responsibilities placed on the buddy system.

If the buddy system becomes well developed and the university is attracting a large a large number of international students, it may be advisable to employ a local student part time (for example 10 hours a week) to coordinate the buddy system. This buddy system coordinator should be placed in the office of the university dealing with the international students as it will help to ensure the successful integration of the buddy system in the university's administration system.

How to manage the buddy system?

How are the buddies found?

Often the buddies are local students who have been abroad studying for a period and after they return home they become involved in the buddy system. Local students, who have still not been abroad, can with advantage be included in the buddy system with the aim of getting them interested in travelling abroad for a period. In most universities finding enough buddies is often a major challenge, which is why some kind of financial motivation is needed as mentioned above.

The experienced buddies or the employed buddy coordinator can organise an information meeting for the local students to make them more aware of the buddy system and the benefits that can be gained from becoming involved.

What training should be provided for the buddies?

In general only limited training is needed for the buddies as they are very familiar with their own university, town and country. However, the buddies need to be informed of their responsibilities, and the responsibilities of the administration and the responsible person. They also need to be informed of the answers to the frequently asked questions. A good way of making this information readily available and transparent is to create a guide for the buddies as it is done for the incoming ERASMUS international students in many universities. It is basically covers the same topics but would written for the buddies.

Moreover a general training on multicultural communication and understanding is also very desirable for the buddies. The buddies are closely involved in supporting the international students during the early months at the university. They will come face to face with the ups and downs experienced by the international students during their stay. To help understand the cultural issues facing the international students and how best to assist them the buddies need to be alert to intercultural communication issues.

How is the buddy system improved and adapted to local needs?

Ongoing evaluation of the buddy system is a valuable tool for ensuring that the buddy system develops to meet the needs of the international students. The evaluation of the buddy system can be a question and answer sheet, which the international students receive some time after their arrival at the university. It can also be done through organised interviews or focus group discussions. An evaluation should always be carried out and findings implement before the next group arrives. To ensure the outcomes of such an evaluation are implemented it is necessary to set up a formal reporting process.

An example of a buddy system

At LIFE at University of Copenhagen the buddy system receives about 100 international students per semester, which has made it necessary to appoint a student buddy coordinator employed by the university for 10 hours per week. This person is responsible of the allocation of the international students to the local buddies (optimal 1-2 international for each local buddy), organising an information meeting for local students (one to inform about the buddy system and then one to organise the local buddies) and bookkeeping, so the financial support from the university can be audited. Besides this the coordinator also

prepares information to be sent to the international students about the buddy system prior to arrival and assist in the planning of the welcome/orientation meeting programme.

Two ad hoc local buddy groups have been established, an event group and a weekend trip group.

The event group organises a number of different events throughout the semester, such as excursions to local museums, international dinners, bowling, and parties. These events are not only attended by the international students, but are also open to the local students to aid the integration of the international students.

At LIFE it has been a tradition to take the international students for a cabin trip one of the first weekends in the semester. This ensures that they have a good social network between each other and the local students involved in the buddy system. A group of local students organise this trip, which can have different perspectives. A theme for the whole weekend is chosen, such as pirates or Vikings and everybody then have to act like this. Different teambuilding exercises are organised during the weekend mostly based on everyday tasks, for instance cooking, dishwashing, cleaning and collecting firewood. Besides this, another typical activity is a walk in the area with several activity points organised by the local students where the international students have to solve various exercises to get familiar with the local community, culture and norms. It is, however, important that not all the time is spent in organised activities but there is time in the weekend trip for relaxing, talking and partying to aid the first steps in integration between international students, and between international student and the local students.

Checklist

- Are the roles and responsibilities of the buddies clearly defined?
- Is the buddy system integrated within the administrative system of the university?
- Who are the buddies responsible to?
- How are the buddies financed?
- What are the training needs of new buddies?
- Is there a need for a buddy system co-ordinator?
- Is there an ongoing evaluation system in place to ensure the continuing enhancement of the buddy system

9 Pre and post departure

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Introduction

The departing Master graduate can provide valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the degree programme. This evaluation can be used in the quality management of the degree programme and of the university services. It is also important to give closure to the degree programme, to celebrate the successful conclusion and to send off the graduate as a future ambassador for the university and the Master degree programme. Successful alumni can play an important role in encouraging potential students to apply for the degree programme and form part of a network for involvement in future collaborative research and development projects.

How should the overall experience of international Master students be evaluated?

The evaluation of the experience of international Master students before departure with regard to the strengths and weaknesses of the degree programme and of the general university services, and their experience of being part of the university community will provide invaluable information for the future development of the Master degree programme. This feedback can be obtained through a questionnaire or through a focus group discussion. The most valuable information will be gained from a focus group discussion. The discussion can focus not only on the students' experience at the university but can also focus on their expectations for their career development on returning home. However, because focus group discussions are time consuming to manage and evaluate they will likely only be used infrequently. Regular end of programme evaluations will probably only be carried out by questionnaire, perhaps online or on computer readable forms to save time on analysis.

At the very least the focus of the evaluation will be at the degree programme level and a general questionnaire about the university services and life at the university. The analysis and follow up is most important. Following the analysis of the responses there should be a formal procedure that identifies the issues which need to be addressed, the action to be taken, and a review after a agreed period, perhaps six months or one year, of the outcome of the action taken. Such a formal process will ensure that issues raised by the graduates are evaluated and addressed.

How should pre-departure closure activities be organised?

Before the graduates depart there should be a closure event. This can be provided by a formal university graduation ceremony, a celebratory party organised by the department, or both. The advantage of a closure event is first to formally congratulate the graduates and secondly to reinforce the feeling that they are part of the wider university community as alumni of the university.

Why maintain contact post-departure

Most universities recognise the benefit of keeping in touch with their alumni. Successful alumni can play an important role in being ambassadors for the department and university, and in encouraging potential students to apply for the degree programme they followed or other degree programmes in the department or faculty. The alumni also form a network for possible involvement in future collaborative research and development projects. There is also the possibility of engaging them in the future in professional updating courses as part of a life long learning programme.

When there is only a limited number of international Master students, after departure activities - if available - are organised in an informal way probably at the departmental level. When there are a considerable number of international Master students universities will have in place an alumni office taking care of the alumni networks abroad. At the very minimum this office will issue an alumni newsletter and provides an alumni website in order to keep the alumni up to date with developments at the university. However, whatever is provided centrally, the department will also want to maintain direct contact with its alumni. It is then important that the central university alumni office works closely with those in a department who are responsible for maintaining contact with the department's alumni.

Checklist

- How will feedback be elicited from the graduating students on the strengths and weaknesses of the Master degree programme?
- How will feedback be elicited from the graduating students on the strengths and weaknesses of the pastoral care they have received and their experience of being part of the university community?
- How will this feedback be incorporated into the internal quality assurance system for the Master degree programme and for the general university support services?
- How will the university keep in touch with its alumni, and at what level – from the degree programme level to the central administration? If more than one section of the university is involved in maintaining contact, what will be the division of responsibility?

10 Conclusion – the need for a university vision

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It is clear from the foregoing chapters that the responsibility for the academic management and pastoral care of international Master students should pervade all parts of the university's structures and processes, from the central administration to each degree programme co-ordinator in the departments and the local students.

International students select a university on the basis of their assessment as to whether the degree programme is likely to meet their expectations and their assessment of the likely quality of the experience that they will receive.

The questions the prospective student is likely to ask regarding the academic studies and pastoral care include:

- do the programme aims and learning outcomes relate to my expectations?
- is there an international perspective evident in the learning outcomes?
- does the teaching and learning strategy take account of the cultural background of international students?
- what is the international experience of the lecturers?
- are the views of international students formally taken account of in the development of the degree programme and in the development of the university?
- do the job destinations of recent graduates relate to my own expectations for my career path?
- is there an orientation programme at the start of the degree programme? Will it be instructive?
- is there a buddy (mentor) system?
- does the university provide help with housing, finance, accompanying persons, visa procedures?
- on first enquiry what kind of reception did I get? Was I given a contact person?

For a university which is committed to the recruitment of international Master students there must be structures and policies in place to ensure that the student will answer "yes" to the above questions. Having such structures in place will depend upon having an embedded international strategy which addresses not only the needs of international students but commits the university as a whole, all staff and students, to performing professionally, socially and emotionally in an international and multicultural context.

A good example comes from the policy of the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB) to develop a international campus with the following objectives and measures:

During their studies at UMB, students are to develop international expertise and intercultural skills

- On its campus, UMB shall have an inclusive culture, providing a secure environment for people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds
- Through specific recruitment and extensive student mobility, UMB shall ensure a significant international and multicultural profile
- UMB shall raise awareness about multicultural issues, and inform about the value of UMB's cultural diversity, both locally and in a global context
- UMB shall promote close cooperation between students from different cultural backgrounds
- In cooperation with the university foundation for student life (SiÅs), UMB wishes to enhance cultural diversity among students by having students from different cultural backgrounds share dormitories
- UMB will support the integration of Norwegian and international students by allocating funds to relevant activities carried out by the students' political organisations
- UMB will support the integration of Norwegian and international students by allocating funds to international work through FODOS, the International Student Union and the International Committee
- UMB shall provide basic Norwegian language courses, an introduction to Norwegian culture and society to international students and employees
- UMB shall support the improvement of its students' English skills by providing teaching and social activities in English
- UMB shall aim to provide student housing to international students throughout their entire stay at UMB.

However, it does not necessarily follow from having a policy document in place that the policy is implemented successfully. It is necessary to set up implementation strategy and a quality assurance system – in essence invoking a quality management cycle: plan – implement – measure – evaluate, and then revise the plan to enhance the implementation of the policy. Central to the ongoing enhancement of the implementation of the policy is to have in place an internal systematic quality assurance process. There will be a quality assurance system for the Master degree programme and one for the pastoral care. This requires defining the policy in terms of benchmarks and the associated indicators which are used to measure the extent to which the benchmarks have been achieved. The quality assurance process will operate at various levels within the university, for example at the central level in perhaps the international committee, at the international office, at the student admissions office, at the department, at the degree programme level. Although the quality assurance process operates at various levels within the university, the quality assurance processes must be linked in a hierarchical manner to provide a unified quality assurance system.

Students are clients of the universities' services and they should be involved in contributing their views in the development of the university. This student voice should be heard at all levels of management within the university, for example at the degree programme level, in the department, in the admissions office, in the student support services, in the international committee and in the governing council of the university. It is becoming common practice in European universities to include student representatives in the management of the university. For a university which strives to become an international campus it is to be expected that the student voice will involve both national and international students.

Thus, the successful recruitment and inclusion of international Master students depends upon respecting their needs as clients of the university, and then ensuring that these needs are met both in the delivery of the degree programme and in the student support services. This is best achieved by a university which has a well developed international policy with an associated implementation plan and quality assurance process for ensuring the continuing enhancement of the planned outcomes.

Checklist

- Do the university's strategic plans set out a policy for the development of the university as an international university?
- Do the university's strategic plans set out a policy for the inclusion of both national and international students in the management of the university?
- Is there an implementation plan in place to ensure that the policies on internationalisation are executed?
- Is there an internal quality assurance process in place to ensure the continual enhancement of the planned outcomes of the international policy, both for the actual Master degree programmes and for the services that assure the pastoral care of the international students?



Education and Culture

Erasmus Mundus

This Handbook addresses the issues in the management of a Master degree programme designed to meet the expectations of international Master students. An international student is defined as a student who is not a national of the country in which the degree programme is delivered. The international students can be from other European countries or from other continents. The Handbook addresses both the academic management of the degree programme and also the pastoral care of the student from first enquiry through to preparation for departure on graduation. At the end of each chapter there is a checklist of questions which will assist in addressing the issues raised.

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