International Strategic Planning

This article sets out essential elements which should be considered when defining and developing the university’s international strategy. It provides the broader context for international strategic plans and the need for each institution to identify its own starting point. Emphasising the unique nature of each plan, the article also introduces the practicalities of the planning process, step by step. The article concludes with a model of how on-going staff engagement with international strategies might work.

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### 1. **Introduction**

**Generic commitment to international work**

At the most generic level, there is clear consensus that all universities are or should be seriously committed to international work, and that there are some very basic initiatives needed in order to achieve an enhanced level of internationalisation, such as the review of curriculum content, mobility schemes for staff and students, attracting gifted staff and students from around the world, and developing strategic alliances and partnerships.

**Need for tailor-made strategy**

However, there is a difference between a sophisticated set of international strategies and policies and a generic set of the usual platitudes. The latter is achieved simply by cutting and pasting existing examples. The first however requires much greater effort and is time consuming. Maybe for that reason it is much less common. It is more usual to find an international strategic plan which, with modest adjustments, could fit dozens of institutions. With a more sophisticated effort, however, anyone reading the strategy, even without seeing the name of the institution, quickly becomes aware of the university to which the strategy applies. This article assumes that a tailor-made or at least bespoke rather than an ‘off-the-shelf’ international strategy will be the aim.

**A means to an end**

Moreover, the assumption here is that internationalism is a means to an end, not a goal in its own right. The key question therefore should be: how can an international strategy support the institution in achieving its institutional strategic ambitions. But before there can be a strategy there has to be some consensus about a vision. It also means that one needs to fully appreciate the nature of the university, its realistic abilities and capabilities, its realistic aspirations and ambitions and understanding how ‘international’ can ensure that the university will be successful in achieving its goals and aims.

**Individuality of each HEI**

All higher education institutions (HEIs) are unique. Like human beings, not one HEI is fully identical to one another. Some might resemble each other to a certain extent in their basic features, and for convenience sake we may wish to group them together, but unless one truly understands the individuality of one’s institution, it will be impossible to formulate effective strategies and policies.

**The academic village metaphor**

Depending on how strict a definition one wants to use, there are roughly 30,000-40,000 universities in the world. Since we tend to interact only with our immediate colleagues – presidents with presidents, international officers with international officers, specialised scholars with specialised scholars etc – it would be an appropriate metaphor to say we are talking about a very modest village community. And like any other village community, some of the village houses, and more importantly the families living in these residences,
stand out through achievement, through wealth, through their historical status, through their specific strength or features, or maybe just through their colour character. But the overwhelming majority is quite grey and nameless. Many live on the outer edges of the community, and quite a few just struggle for survival in the slums\(^1\) of the academic village because like in the global village, the gap between the haves and have-nots in this academic village is wide and there is little indication the gap is closing.

As in the global village, some inhabitants of the academic village want to better themselves, want to be closer to the (perceived) centre, are keen to compete, to mature, to rejuvenate, to defend their position; in other words, the academic village tends to be a lively place. Some will be ruthless in their ambition, some will progress through smart partnerships, some are just lucky through changing fortunes, or plain unlucky. But unlike the global village, in the academic village by and large there is a much greater awareness of justice, a more prominent presence of values less often found in the commercial world, and an appreciation of the need for some solidarity. This village, though as said modest in size, is physically spread over the entire globe. Yet despite being disperse and despite sometimes fierce competition, there clearly is a community spirit. Of course, like in any other village, real life at times can be much tougher than we like to believe or want the outside world to believe.

2. Positioning the institution

2.1 The monastic ideal

As with human beings, the main reasons why all universities are so different is due to their past – both in the form of their ‘DNA’ and in the form of their more immediate ‘upbringing’ – and due to the environment or context they operate in. The DNA of universities is the result of historical development of the higher education sector. All universities might be different but they also are all related, being somehow part of one big family. In Europe in particular, virtually all universities – even very young or for-profit HEIs – carry the DNA of the university’s monastic roots: the times when the university community was effectively a religious one.

\(^1\) I want to express my acknowledgement to Hans van Ginkel, former president of UNU, who mentioned the inspiring concept of ‘universities in the slums of the global village’ at a seminar organised by LEWI, Hong Kong Baptist University, Autumn 1998.
### Values reflect community ideals

The values of many universities still reflect in some degree those early ideals. In many universities one is still a member of a community, rather than a staff-employee or a student-customer. Importantly, these academic ideals and values determine whether strategies and policies are acceptable to the larger community, both within the sector as a whole and within a specific institution. Obviously, in some especially younger or non-traditional HEIs this ancient concept is much less prominent, but it rarely has entirely disappeared.

### Differentiating factors

One factor that differentiates universities is how strongly this original DNA is still present within the university community. But also, in how far the community is willing to modernise. Or, on the contrary, how much some of the younger more modern universities are willing to embrace the original academic values (in addition to the quaint traditional paraphernalia), in order to gain status and prestige within the academic village.

### Refuge or interaction

As in the original European monasteries, a key differentiating factor is whether an institution wants to offer its community a refuge from society, or on the contrary wants to form a base for close interaction with society. The original monastic ideal was to withdraw from society and create an oasis for contemplation, protected from societal influence. But very soon an alternative emerged, whereby on the contrary the order wanted to interact with the surrounding society to contribute to the greater good, including material progress and/or greater social justice.

At universities however this has rarely been such a black and white choice. In most cases both features are present and the distinction is much more one of dark light grey versus light dark grey. To an outsider the differences might be too sophisticated to distinguish. Yet as a consequence of the competitiveness of village life, those who populate the academic village tend to exaggerate these differences, as in a caricature.

### Global brotherhood

Still, despite these differences, all HEIs remain part a global brotherhood. In fact higher education is one of the few sectors in the world whereby an academic member of that brotherhood is likely to receive some form of hospitality when visiting another university, wherever geographically based. It is an unwritten rule that all who are part of the higher education in principle are willing to support, welcome, host colleagues from any other part of the world, though some may be more hospitable than others. The original monastic brotherhood concept has more or less survived over the centuries, and connects all who are engaged in higher education across the world.
Thus, internationalisation is an ingredient that has been elementary to academic life from the very beginnings of higher education. So it tends to be a common factor, well understood, yet to be pursued strategically in quite different manners in the distinct institutions. In order to formulate effective strategies and policies, one need to understand where an institution currently is and where it would or should wish to be.

2.2 The public good concept

Given the DNA of higher education as a whole, for almost all HEIs there is a common understanding that the funding they receive is ideally one of patronage. Perfect funding consists of donations for the academic good, without any form of accountability. Donations to the university are for a good cause, or possibly for doing good work. All that is given in return is the possible offering of a degree of immortality to the name of the donor. Obviously, this is – just – an ideal.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, university finance was given a very different footing and a real boost when nation states, regional and local authorities and even business communities started to take an immediate interest in higher education. The state university emerged quickly after the birth of the nation state. This introduced another important DNA element to the sector: that of the HEI as a public institution, operating in a national higher education system, with as its primary role to serve the interests of the sponsoring environment. Even private universities often will proudly operate on a not-for-profit basis, and those who operate explicitly on a for-profit basis sooner or later still will need to demonstrate contribution to public welfare, unless they want to end up as pariahs in the village.

Accountability, in strict financial terms as well as in value terms, is very much linked to the concept of higher education as a public good. Not surprisingly, a powerful motivator to the internationalisation of higher education therefore has been how this contributes to national, regional or local interests. This has created the paradox of international education – pursuing international education for the sake of national or local interests.

This paradox is very different from internationalism as an academic value, yet one does not exclude the other. In the paradox it is understood that ‘international’ is crucial for national success in the globalised world, that education should prepare students for globalisation, and that there is an international competition for talent in terms of students, lecturers and researchers. Academic internationalism might not recognise these national (or local, or European) interest, but does subscribe to the strategic objectives within the institution.
2.3 The university as an enterprise

By and large the most prominent change happening in higher education in Europe and elsewhere at the start of the 21st century is not so much the enhancement of internationalisation or growing external pressure to pursue international education, but the birth of the concept of the university as an enterprise. It is not that historically universities lacked an enterprising spirit. But with a dominant presence of patronage or state funding, market forces did not interfere too much with academic life, nor did academic life need to interfere too much with markets. Universities were spending rather than earning institutions.

But pull and push factors have been moving many HEIs in quite a new direction, with a much more prominent place for commerce, for enterprise and for market demands. The need (or desire) to generate income other than that of state subsidies has had a profound impact on some universities, and even gave birth to the term ‘education industry’ and a willingness to incorporate business practices in daily operations. Though few universities would define themselves as a business, many universities accept – with a varying degree of excitement – the need to operate in a business-like manner and to generate income from commercial activities and in the free market.

The global demand for higher education, with a large number of students willing and able to bear the full economic cost of their study, fits this new direction perfectly. Income from international fees allows for growing numbers of HEIs to compensate for loss of state funding or to fund the ambition to move up in the perceived status of the academic village. Other forms of international education, such as franchises, international executive education, branch campuses, consultancy activities can also all help to satisfy the desire or need to generate income.

These sometimes blatantly commercial activities can create tension with original academic values, yet not by definition; nor is there an automatic conflict with the immediate interest, as expressed by the international education paradox. In fact, when it comes to internationalisation there can be a mutual reinforcement of strategic drivers, though how this is implemented in practice and which elements will be emphasised will very much vary according to each institution.
2.4 Other factors

For the sake of simplification, only three prominent features of HEI DNA have been highlighted here – the monastic ideal, the public good concept and the more modern entrepreneurial realism. It is clear that the presence of these three features can be felt in almost all HEIs, but that the precise mixture results in unique institutions. In reality there are many more elements in the academic DNA, which helps to explain why diversity is such a prominent feature of higher education.

This diversity is a strength of the higher education sector, yet also stimulates a desire for competition, a popular demand for rankings, and an academic desire for categorisation in order to understand the diversity better. Importantly however, the diversity is not just determined by the academic equivalent of the biology of higher education, but also by a level of self-determination. HEIs tend to have a very long life span and are capable of influencing their own evolution. Some change will be the result of external factors, other change will come from strong leadership within the university community embracing change, e.g. to mature the institution or on the contrary to rejuvenate it. Some change will result from necessity, e.g. as a survival strategy, while other change will result from a desire to enhance quality, status, sustainability.

Strategy is what helps an institution to get to its goals. Policies and procedures give guidance and rules to action within the organisational framework: what to do with specific issues, e.g. the selection of an institutional partner or establishing and managing exchanges.

The external social and economic factors might stimulate this evolution process, yet at the same time there will be counter pressures. The higher education system as such tends to be conservative, whereby vested interests are well defended and whereby a desire of an institution to evolve quickly is criticised as ‘mission drift’. For many, the ideal higher education village is one based on a ‘caste’ system, whereby too high aspirations are frowned upon and whereby members of the academic community are naturally inclined to resist any upset to the village harmony.

External and internal conservatism is a key challenge when defining and implementing strategies that aim at change, and not surprisingly this is precisely what institutional strategies are normally about. However, it is also this natural conservatism that contributes to the longevity of HEIs, in comparison with the very short lifespan, on average, of especially organisations in the private sector. Avoiding extreme risks (gambles), maintaining a (very) long term perspective, being sceptical of fashions and incorporating change rather than keenly replacing proven concepts, are by and large positive features. But obviously at the same time these are major obstacles when implementing a change strategy.
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<td><strong>Retaining old structures</strong></td>
<td>The higher education sector has proved itself to possess the remarkable ability to incorporate change without transformation of the basics. A critical look at the very structure of the higher education system – with its bachelor degree, its piece of ‘master’ work and its final doctoral test and all its professorial paraphernalia – shows how universities in essence have been able to retain the ancient guild system. This was abolished in large parts of European society as a consequence of the Enlightenment and specifically the French Revolution, yet somehow the university systems were able to remain untouched by this dramatic transformation in societies all over Europe.</td>
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<td><strong>Staff structures</strong></td>
<td>Similarly, most universities have been able to retain a sharp separation of academic and non-academic staff, not unlike an upstairs-downstairs division in a Victorian mansion. The support staff is there, almost invisibly, to ensure that the academic staff can excel, whilst in almost any other truly modern organisation one would expect a much greater appreciation of mutual dependency and distinct roles.</td>
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<td><strong>Management structures</strong></td>
<td>This rather old fashioned approach to organisational structure even applies sometimes to its management. To make a comparison with the private sector, even though no doubt there is an advantage if for instance the CEO of a major airline company is a former pilot, its shareholders probably will be more interested in other qualities. Yet many universities still believe in the concept of the academic-turned-manager, who reluctantly has taken up this burden. For many institutions elections still form the basis of university management, and the rectors and vice-rectors are in the original sense of the term ‘amateur administrators’.</td>
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<td><strong>Impact on international strategy</strong></td>
<td>Interestingly, most of the time this rather old-fashioned concept seems to work quite well, as it ensures a much better community spirit where people are less interested in working hours and salaries. It also suits much better a community of highly creative, unconventional, critical and even recalcitrant spirits. Unfortunately it does not fit very well the emerging concept of the university as an enterprise. This does impact on international strategy. Because the most outstanding staff can move around the academic village at will, when universities create an environment that resembles the corporate world too much, they may lose their ‘star professors’. Yet at the same time many ‘star professors’ are more sensitive to salaries than we idealistically like to believe. In other words, if a university is in a position to make the right offer, they are even more likely to move. So being wealthy in the academic village, whether through old or through new money, is a key factor in the game. And a strategy to strengthen the financial position of a university is likely to underpin the broader strategy of enhancing academic prestige.</td>
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The academic track record of a university is very much the result of being able to attract outstanding academic staff as well as being able to attract outstanding students who after graduation will be able to demonstrate the value of the university’s degree. The track record of staff and alumni in turn determines status of a university and hence also its ability to attract more income. And of course income, if spent wisely, will allow for attracting better staff and students which in turn create a stronger track record. In other words, progress depends on universities achieving an upward spiral of income-enhanced track record in performance – prestige – higher levels of income etc.

Key to all this is the search for talent (staff and students) as well as the increase in income. International strategy can play a major part in this. Regarding additional income, as mentioned earlier, it does help when a university is allowed to charge full cost fees to international students. Regarding attracting the best talent, it makes a big difference how wide one is able to cast the nets: locally or nationally or globally. When operating in a free market globally for the best staff and the best students, language becomes a major factor. In the old times, with Latin being the universal language, universities had a more level playing field. When the nation state universities emerged and became part of national systems, they also adopted a national (or sometimes regional) language as tool for instruction. This gave a clear advantage to universities that operated in the new *lingua franca*, which has since emerged clearly as English.

Not surprisingly, the introduction of English or even making the university bilingual has been a key element in the international strategies of universities. It is probably fair to say that the nearer a university is to the centre of the academic village, or the greater its level of ambition to move closer to the prestigious core, the more likely teaching and working in English will be a prominent part of the international strategy. Of course, the language issue will be less relevant for those HEIs that are comfortable with a more regional/national mission and whose international aspirations fit better with the ‘international paradox’. Also, understandably the situation will be different for institutions that operate in a secondary major language, e.g. Spanish, since that will still cover a very large market. Interestingly, this makes the language issue a quite complex yet important, and often also quite emotional, element in any international strategy.
3. **Formulating international strategy and policies**

The most important part of the international strategy – arguably even more important than the content itself – is the process of formulating the strategy and policies.

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<th>Enriching overall university aims</th>
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<td>As will be clear from the reasoning so far, the international strategy and policies will need to be based on the overall vision for the institution and underpin the strategic objectives. The international strategy should not be a strategy in its own right, but should be a tool to achieve the broader objectives. At the same time, the international vision and strategies can enrich the overall university aims. This requires a planning process that allows for a dialogue between the overall strategy, international strategy and of course other university strategies. This is not always the case at HEIs. The effectiveness of the institution’s strategic planning however very much depends on this ongoing synergy between the different parts of the strategic planning process.</td>
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<th>Links to faculties and departments</th>
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<td>Another crucially important factor is how the university strategy is converted through the more implementation-oriented strategies of faculties, schools, departments, support units, corporate services. It is clear that the effectiveness depends heavily on the willingness and ability for these sub-units to align their own strategies. Moreover, one would expect a similar vertical dialogue in the strategic planning process whereby faculties, schools, departments etc can influence the central strategies, not just once but on a regular or even ongoing basis.</td>
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<th>Clarity and simplicity</th>
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<td>Step one is to formulate a common vision that underpins the international strategy. As a rule of thumb, it should never take more than ten minutes to present the key concepts and objectives of a plan. The need for clarity includes the need for achieving a common terminology, though one will want to avoid lengthy academic discussions about definitions. But as will be argued in this section, clarity rather than academic thoroughness or careful compromise is the key to success in an international strategic plan. Achieving clarity and simplicity is more demanding than settling for complexity, and it often does require following a long, complex and winding road of discussion to achieve that clear and simple common vision.</td>
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<th>Multi-year plans and reviews</th>
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<td>Since international strategic planning will always be a long-term effort, with substantial results emerging only after several years of effort, institution-wide preparation and agreement is needed for a multi-year plan, covering a minimum of five years, but possibly ten years.</td>
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As with all other sensible strategic planning, reviews should be foreseen, annually and at a more substantial level at least every five (better every three) years. These reviews need to be conducted against clearly defined targets, where possible quantitative.

Obviously it is impossible to set targets without being aware of the starting point. So before much of the discussion about the real strategic objectives can start, one first needs to agree on a survey of existing operations. Ideally this survey does not collect data for the sake of data, but is focussed in finding data that might be relevant for the strategic plan. Since formulating the plan will involve many stakeholders, this will be an evolving process, and one should therefore be prepared for the possibility that the first survey did not identify all the information needed, and may have to be supplemented by a second even more focussed search.

It is not unreasonable, though, for efficiency to be imposed on this part of the planning process, and that there is a clear time line with action points against which the plan is being developed. Experience shows that for a thorough process, twelve months normally should be sufficient, even for a quite large and complex organisation. A longer process can damage confidence in the institutional commitment and ability to deliver.

It is often assumed that surveys are just about finding out what is done within the institution – in itself an important and not always easy assignment. In fact, and especially so in the case of an international plan, it is also vital to seek external benchmarks and even find inspiration from what is done elsewhere. Some of this can be done through desk research, but by and large it is wise to involve external experts, as sources of information and advice. Whether one pays such experts or not depends mainly on how professional one wants to be in formulating the plan, and probably also on what kind of benefits one anticipates to obtain from the international strategy.

The very first step of any professional planning process is seeking agreement within senior management on the time line, on the stakeholders who should be involved, on time frame and deadlines, on the surveys need to be conducted etc. It is therefore useful to get agreement on available staff time, a clear timetable, hard deadlines and possibly funds for external expertise. Also, it is advisable that the plan is drafted not by an individual but by a task force – sometimes called a ‘vision committee’ – i.e. a group of influential voices. This will later ensure a greater level of institutional acceptance. At a later stage some of the members of this initial committee may join an implementation group or the evaluation committee, so the members should have substantial authority within the university community.
### 3.2 Addressing the big strategic issues

The plan will first need to address all the big strategic issues. By and large, the process will work better when the natural temptation to move too fast to the operational aspects is resisted. In some cases, it might even be a good idea to allow for a set of plans generated over time instead of one big proposal. For instance:

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<th>Planning stages</th>
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<td>• The initial plan will not speak much about costs or operations, only about the ‘big vision’. The emphasis will be on academic rationale and will seek to demonstrate internal support.</td>
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<td>• A follow-up plan can then focus on implementation in a multi-year prospect, introducing the basic issues of staff, expenditure, maybe income projections.</td>
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<td>• The third planning stage will then set out the details of the operations: what will be done in which part of the world and/or by which part of the institution etc.</td>
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The advantage of this strategy is that it allows for time to introduce the new element in neat stages. The main disadvantage is that it takes much more time. However, if the planning process is a continuum the latter is less of an issue. It can be a major consideration though when no solid international strategic plan has yet been formulated.

Another risk of presenting the new strategic direction in stages is that there will be criticism on Plan 1 that there is insufficient insight in operational matters and costs.

The main risk of presenting everything in one plan is that the discussion will focus immediately on the costs, the staff/units involved etc, which make it difficult to receive much support for the bigger ambition. No simple formula can be given here since there are pluses and minuses linked to both approaches. The main advice is to try to anticipate criticism and be ready to move straight to the next stage as soon as the conditions are right.

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On a practical level, at universities plans quickly turn into very lengthy documents. There is no correlation between the length of a plan and its quality. One therefore should consider these very basic rules:

- make sure the plan starts with a very clear one page executive summary;
- use quantitative arguments as much as possible;
- for lengthy reports, make sure there is a clear summary at the end of each chapter;
- if necessary create lengthy appendices, by moving all that is not essential for the plan outside the main text;
- consider undertaking a series of consultative visits to the different faculties, departments and other units at the institution, seeking open discussion and soliciting feedback, before submitting the plan to senior management.

Handout B 1.1-3-1  Basic rules for plans

Communication, especially proper communications in the form of seeking feedback and engaging in dialogue, is probably the most important part of the production process of the written international strategy. This is because, though we quickly speak about 'the university', in reality this is a collection of individuals. Success in a large and complex university community depends on how one interacts with the key players. However, this should not be confused with a democratic process. Consultation is not about voting and in this context leadership is not about being the voice of the majority or vested interests, though for universities with an elected senior management at times this may pose dilemmas.

At the risk of being repetitive, during this process it should never be forgotten that the plan is not a goal in itself, but that implementation of the plan is. A good plan is worthless with bad implementation, but a weak plan can still work with smart implementation. So implementation always needs to be the main focus of the plan writing. In order to achieve this, one should normally follow the tested procedures of strategic planning. After the almost compulsory SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) exercise, it is advisable to use the GNOME (goals-needs-objectives-methods-evaluation) method, since this avoids moving too fast from goals to methods.

After a description of the clearly defined and argued goals, the plan first identifies the agreed needs at the different levels or for the different stakeholders (e.g. what does the institution need, given its overall strategic vision and objectives, what are the needs for the students, staff, at school level, external parties etc). This enables a clear formulation of the concrete objectives, ideally in the form of action steps defined in time and with possible measurable outcomes or KPIs (key
performance indicators). Only then one should move to the methods: how to achieve these. Most importantly, a good strategic plan concludes by spelling out how and when and against which criteria the evaluation of progress will take place.

**Support from above and below**

To achieve successful implementation, the international strategy plan will need support from ‘top’ and ‘bottom’. The issue is not so much whether it should be formulated top-down or bottom-up, it needs to be done both ways, since no rapid progress can be made unless the institution’s head and legs look and walk in the same direction.

The senior level might mean support of the board or executive of the university and/or the university’s supervisory board or maybe ministry. Unanimous support is not required but broad support is imperative.

**Positive attitudes among influential players**

However, getting enthusiasm at managerial level will be much easier if one can demonstrate that important parts of the institution support the ideas. Most essential is getting a positive attitude among the influential deans or highly regarded professors. At the same time, getting buy-in from relevant central units/directors, for instance the university secretary or registrar and/or director of finance, will be a great help when it comes to implementation.

**‘Cosmopolitans’ and ‘locals’**

The people who should drive the formulation and implementation of the international strategic plan are cosmopolitans, rather than locals, and hence strongly dislike university politics, with its continuous stream of lengthy meetings, lengthy policy papers with carefully chosen words and piles of spreadsheets. One should be alert that those who volunteer to engage in internal discussion might be the ‘locals’. Part of the process is actually about bringing cosmopolitans and locals closer together, and to create bridges in the natural internal segregation within the university community.

**Barriers to implementation**

Though not part of the strategic planning as such, given the required focus on implementation, one should be aware of the likely barriers to implementation, externally but more relevantly also internally:

- generic scepticism and vested interests
- rigid structures and procedures
- lack of resources, financial and human.

**Friends, foes and fence-sitters**

Plus, given human nature, one should acknowledge that there will be in any community a number of sometimes quite vocal individuals with anti-foreign sentiments. The university community will therefore consist of supporters or friends of any international strategy, the foes and the fence-sitters. It is natural to want to rely on friends, but this is not advisable. With staff changes these friends may come and go. Moreover, there is a risk of isolation. Focusing energy on foes is likewise
not advisable. The best strategy is to treat them as a minor irritation, and instead put all effort into winning over the fence-sitters. Battles are won on the middle ground.

In many HEIs, formulating and agreeing the international strategic plan is seen as a procedure with a fixed outcome that needs to be repeated at regular intervals, normally once every five years. But as argued in this section, really effective strategic planning is a dynamic and in itself quite complex process, whereby the process itself is probably just as important as the actual text of the plan. It is through this process that internal dialogues, staff engagement and commitment to implementation are established, or, in business speak, ‘corporate buy-in’.

### 3.3 Staff engagement

This section provides an example of how on-going staff engagement with international strategies might work. It is based on a model developed at the University of Westminster, a highly international and internationally highly successful HEI in central London.

The university established approximately ten so-called ‘region focus groups’. Each group monitors the university’s work in a specific world region. Meetings take place three times a year and are open to any member of staff with an interest in the region. The purpose is three-fold:

- exchange of information about work or activities in the region;
- involvement in communicating strategic issues and helping to formulate strategies, including the interaction of a regional strategy with the university-wide international strategy;
- highlighting issues of concern or interest.

Each region focus group is chaired by a dean or senior member of academic staff. These chairs form the core of the membership of a university-level closed committee known as the ‘international forum’. The international forum also meets three times a year, and is chaired by the university’s vice-president for international and institutional development, who has the executive responsibility for international strategy. All chairs of the region focus groups report on discussions in their own groups. In addition to them a number of heads of relevant corporate services attend the meetings. Minutes of international forum meetings are submitted to the university’s executive board and/or academic council.
The purpose of these structures is to ensure that all staff have an opportunity to engage with international strategy and operations. Communication takes place as a proper dialogue rather than just disseminating information. No staff member can ever claim to be excluded, and in return over the years some very useful issues have been raised via these groups. This subject-focused staff engagement system bypasses the formal structure-based communication that follows the much more complex and often heavily filtered route via line managers, from individual to department to school to executive and cascading back again.

Where implementation of a plan is the real purpose of strategic planning, it should also be recognised that the structured monitoring, plan evaluation and most importantly on-going broad staff engagement form the basis of long term success in plan implementation.

Biography:

Dr Maurits Van Rooijen studied at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. His involvement in international education started two decades ago at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, and he has worked in many countries, including USA, Australia and since 1993 the UK. He is currently Vice President for International and Institutional Development of the University of Westminster in London, which has almost 6,000 international students (of a total of 23,000) from over 150 nationalities and staff of some 75 nationalities. Dr Maurits Van Rooijen is also president of the Compostela Group of Universities (www.grupocompostela.org), president of the World Association for Cooperative Education (www.waceinc.org), and vice-president of the European Access Network (www.ean-edu.org).