A collaborative approach in the internationalisation cycle of Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the need for a collaborative approach among all stakeholders and service providers at universities to promote and enhance their internationalisation efforts within higher education institutions. As outlined by the last addition to the internationalisation cycle presented by De Wit (2002), a supportive culture that will facilitate the integration of internationalisation into all aspects of institutions is critical to success. It is emphasized that internationalisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance the quality of education, research and service function of the university. Further, internationalization may be enhanced by adding a collaborative component into all university services, thereby engaging key stakeholders.

This paper offers a fresh and innovative approach linking formal and informal services inside higher education institutions, in order to formulate the best strategies to integrate collaborative services and approaches into the regular activities of formal or institutional services.

Keywords: internationalisation cycle, support services, collaborative approach, stakeholders

1.1 Introduction

Internationalisation as a concept has been extensively researched in the field of higher education as well as in other fields. In an attempt to outline the concept many authors have agreed on a number of broad definitions to conceptualise the new, global phenomenon. The Bologna process was a key component catalysing the internationalisation efforts of European institutions. It aimed to make higher education more attractive to students from other parts of the world and to facilitate intra-European mobility (Teichler 2009); moreover, it sought to standardise system-wide European higher education processes that indirectly supported the internationalisation efforts of European higher education institutions.

The number of mobile students has grown significantly in the last twenty years, reflecting the expansion of tertiary education systems worldwide: according to the last report from Education at a Glance, nearly five million students may be included in this category (OECD 2017). European higher education institutions have also been focusing on international strategies and cooperation agreement to attract international students from all parts of the world, the ERASMUS programme being the most well-known and successful evidence of the mobility exchanges within the European Union and an important part of the internationalisation efforts of institutions. Nevertheless, mobility is not all, and a more comprehensive approach to internationalisation of higher education is called for (Hudzik 2014), increasing awareness that internationalisation has to become more inclusive and less elitist.

Thus, this paper focuses on a key aspect of the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions. It encourages a supportive culture that will facilitate not only mobility schemas but also the integration of internationalisation in all aspects of institutions by using a collaborative approach between formal, informal services and all stakeholders.

1.2 How do we define internationalisation to be more inclusive and supportive for all stakeholders inside the institution?

The term began to be used widely by higher education sector in the 1980s (Knight 2012 p. 27) and over the years, the meaning of the term internationalisation has changed and, in some cases, its purpose. This has resulted in differing definitions and agreements about terminology; leaving out some misconceptions about the term. The definition of internationalisation has evolved since 1994 when internationalisation was first defined by Knight (1994 p. 3) as "the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of higher education".

The definition of internationalisation evolved to highlight its international and intercultural dimension: "Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (Knight and De Wit 1997 p. 8). It is important to note that Knight and De Wit identify three components in this definition: internationalisation is, first, process and second a response to globalisation (not to be confused with the globalisation process itself). Third, it includes both international and local elements, represented in the definition by the term "intercultural" (Knight and De Wit 1997).

In 2002 Söderqvist (2002 p. 42) introduced a new definition that for the first time described internationalisation as a change process from a national to an international higher education institution. Moreover, she added a holistic view of management at the institutional level, an inclusive approach engaging more stakeholders in the process. In fact, definitions started to move forward to a more comprehensive understanding assessed by Hudzik (2011 p. 6) as a:

[…] commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units.

Consequently, it is claimed that a more comprehensive approach to internationalisation of higher education (Hudzik 2014) will increase the awareness that internationalisation has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on mobility but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes (European Parliament 2015). One indicator of the inclusiveness and the change of focus is the recent definition of internationalisation by the Internationalisation of Higher Education study, which was requested and published by the European Parliament (2015 p. 33):

the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

This definition is heavily informed by the commonly-used definition provided by Knight (2003). However, it extends Knight's definition to represent the inner culture of institutions and to reflect the importance of internationalisation as an ongoing, comprehensive and intentional process that gathers together all stakeholders as internationalisation agents, focusing on all students and staff rather than only the few who have the opportunity to be mobile. Indeed, more inclusive and supportive actions were taken towards a more comprehensive internationalisation process. The next part of the chapter focuses on internationalisation strategies and the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions, where all stakeholders play a role.

1. 3 Internationalisation strategies and support services

University strategic management covers a series of actions and services taking place at the institution. There are different support services (formal and informal) that impact the internationalisation process. Bianchi (2013) identifies the provision of two types of services: core (which are related to teaching and learning) and peripheral (those related to the living conditions and the environment of the host country, such as security, cultural and social activities, accommodation, transportation and visa/entry requirements). Knight and De Wit (1995) highlight the relevance of extra-curricular activities and institutional services by identifying a list of special services that are needed to support a university's internationalisation strategy: international students' advice services, orientation programmes, social events and other facilities for foreign guests, international student associations, international houses for students and scholars, international guest organisations, and institutional facilities for foreign students and scholars (such as libraries, restaurants, medical services, sporting facilities, etc.). According to a recent doctoral study (Perez-Encinas 2017) as well as sources including the UNESCO Book titled "Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues and Best Practices" (2009) by Ludeman, Hidalgo, Oste, & Wang, the ESNsurvey 2016, and the ISANA guide (2011), among others, a list of services that universities can offer is presented. These include: admission offices, administrative services, academic support/advising, international offices, IT and system support, counselling services, careers advisory service/employability, library, language courses, buddy/mentor systems, orientation and welcome activities, healthcare and safety, accommodation offices, campus engagement, campus eating places, student organisations, disability support office, alumni service, emergency numbers, family support, community services, sports, cultural adaptation, student affairs assessment and city offerings.

The provision of the aforementioned support services can enhance and strengthen the internationalisation strategy of higher education institutions. As a first step, institutions should

analyse and develop their internationalisation plans in accordance with their needs, aims and priorities. Second, they can incorporate some of the relevant activities and support services into their strategic plans (De Wit 2002; Knight and De Wit 1995). Third, they may seek to integrate the views of key stakeholders of higher education institutions in all actions and activities to promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. And, finally, they may re-assess the internationalisation plan in collaboration with these critical stakeholders on an intermittent basis.

Support services and diverse activities taking place in higher education institutions under the auspices of overall university strategies have been categorized by Knight and De Wit (1995) in two main groups: programme strategies and organisational strategies. The first category relates to academic activities and services that integrate the international dimension into the higher education institution. The second category refers to the development of appropriate policies and administration systems in order to maintain that international dimension (De Wit 2002; Knight and De Wit 1995). Therefore we may observe that support services and internationalisation activities may fall under both of those categories, which are indeed of equal importance. In order to provide a holistic approach to the internationalisation of higher education, all aspects, activities, and university strategies (programme-based and organizational) must be in focus in order to reach the mission of the institution.

1.4 Trends and Issues in International Student Services

As stated previously, there are different activities and support services that universities can offer to (international) students support the internationalisation process of universities. Internationalisation of higher education seeks to include not only foreign or mobile students, but rather all types of students inside higher education. In most cases, institutions offer support services specifically oriented for international or foreign students and have a designated office for that purpose. International student services (ISS) has been an evolving concept at some institutions of higher education, while it is regarded as a well-established practice at others. Although its definition might differ from country to country or among organisational types, institutions that host international students share one mutual goal: to support international students in their educational and cultural transition during their studies abroad.

Recognising the potential impact on the students' experiences and success, as well as recruitment and retention efforts, some institutions are becoming more intentional about equipping their ISS with the necessary resources and staffing to serve the complex needs of international students and help them develop global and intercultural competencies during their stay on campus and in the community (Ward 2016). Although the structure of ISS might differ from institution to institution, and be organised in the form of centralised or decentralised services, it is tied to programmes and services provided to students in relation to their formal and informal education at the postsecondary level (Osfield et al. 2016). According to the European Union's Erasmus Impact Study (2014), the increase in the number of both inbound and outbound students has led to an increased awareness of the necessity of providing support services and streamlining administrative procedures. At many universities, this has in turn resulted in the establishment and further strengthening of support services for international students. Providing support services does not only enhance the internationalisation vision of a university, but also has a potentially important role to play in terms of attracting and retaining international students (Kelo et al. 2010), as well as building momentum for the future recruitment of high-quality students.

These trends have been identified and categorised in five major groups (Ammigan & Perez-Encinas, 2017 forthcoming): (1) increased responsibility for providing immigration services to the international community on campus; (2) the importance of developing strong support through a collaborative programming and outreach model; (3) using key strategic communication strategies to

maintain contact with international students; (4) the need for assessing international student satisfaction as a way to improve support services; and (5) the preparation for managing crisis and response to emergencies.

1.4. 1 Collaborative services inside institutions

The role of international student support services is an important driver in the internationalisation efforts of a university (Perez-Encinas 2017). In fact, due to the growing numbers of mobile students the provision of student services has become a key topic among academics and other stakeholders involved in the process of internationalising higher education. Therefore providing support services and integration activities by and for staff members, faculty members and students will increase the internationalisation of the campuses and, moreover, enhance their attractiveness in comparison to other institutions (Perez-Encinas 2017).

Additionally, institutions seeking to attract and retain international students are adopting student services and programming to meet their expectations (ACE 2016), in order to not only create an international campus, but also to offer an inclusive environment that meets the needs of international students, both academically and culturally, not to mention personally. Indeed, figuring out the best way to meet the needs of international students is not an easy process (ACE 2016), although more programmes and services are being provided to more international students because this is becoming central to the work of all student affairs professionals at the university, not just those who work in the international office (ACE 2016). Hence, a collaborative approach is encouraged for all stakeholders within higher education institutions, with the goal of working together towards supporting an international culture with international and domestic students and staff members. Student support is requested not only by international students; domestic students may well be "interculturally deficient". Leask (2009) suggests that international educators "move away from deficit models of engagement, which position international students as interculturally deficient and home students as interculturally efficient, when both need support".

Another important service where a collaborative approach is important relates to the integration of international and domestic students. Besides attracting and receiving international students to enrich the campus and provide an international atmosphere, the integration of international students on the campus is desired. Unfortunately, there is still much to be done to socially integrate international students and local students. Key actions to foster integration include: (1) to identify students' needs in the institution, regardless of whether they are domestic or international students, (2) to include all stakeholders and community members to foster engagement and (3) to associate and collaborate with different services and organizations on campus for a better social integration provided by and with different agents. Social integration has been defined by (Rienties et al. 2012) as the extent to which students adapt to the social way of life at university. Some studies have addressed the integration of students in higher education. Tinto (1975, 1998) notes that students have a variety of educational experiences, competences, skills and values, as well as family and community backgrounds before they enter into higher education. These previous personal experiences might influence how students integrate in higher education, socially and academically. Another interesting finding from Tinto (1975, 1998) is that students do not only need to focus on their studies to graduate and succeed academically, they also need to participate in the student culture that universities provide. Authors such as Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld (2005) found that social support by family and friends (i.e. social networks of students) had a positive influence on the study success of first-year students. This data can be related to international students and to the efforts of an inclusive and comprehensive strategy for internationalisation.

Some recommendations for the strategic development of an international community include: to connect international initiatives with the institution´s existing strategic priorities; to focus on

continuous data-driven approaches to decision making; and to forge flexible coalitions with key campus stakeholders. Another recommendation is to collaborate with the international student community, which involves empowering international students to participate in open forums, serve as representatives at fairs, be responsible for the organisation of events, etc.

All these endeavors may positively impact students' social and academic experiences. The American Council on Education (2016), in their report on "Integrating International Students", highlights four key methods to provide the best possible experience for international students: welcoming international students, adjusting services and programmes to meet their needs, facilitating interaction between international and other students, and assessing students' experiences. Subsequently, de Wit has identified a missing component (related to a collaborative approach); this will be explored in the following section.

1.5 The Internationalisation cycle and the missing component

An internationalisation cycle has been developed to facilitate the phases and process of internationalisation in higher education institutions. The modified internationalisation cycle described below by De Wit (2002) highlights that all phases of the internationalisation process in a given institution combine distinct points of view. The proposed cycle, a combination of Van der Wende and Knights's internationalisation cycle, takes into account several variables. Van der Wende (1999) puts emphasis on the internal and external factors affecting the environment (the analysis of the context), and the implementation and long term effects, while Knight's cycle (Knight 1994) relates more to the awareness, commitment, planning, organisation and review. The internal circle, an addition by De Wit (2002), represents the supportive culture that will facilitate the integration of internationalisation into all aspects of institutions. There is an implicit emphasis that internationalisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance the quality of education, research and service function of the university.
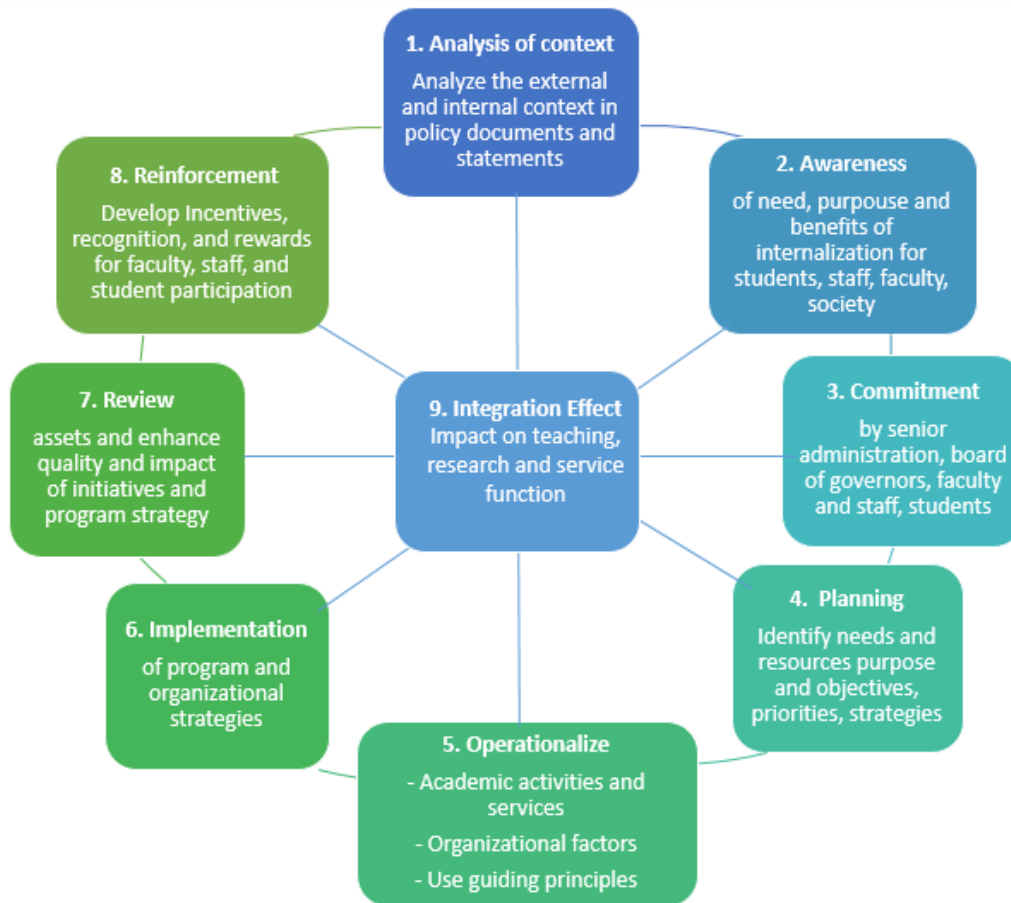
Fig. 1*: Internationalisation cycle, modified version (De Wit 2002)*

In fact, De Wit's (2002) modified version brings a comprehensive perspective to the internationalisation cycle by combining approaches and including the integration effect: it gathers together the six elements of Knight's cycle (1994) with three elements from Van der Wende (1999). This means that the internal circle acts as an integration effect promoting a supportive culture in the institution. In addition, I argue that there is a missing component in the internationalisation cycle, highlighting the key inclusion of all stakeholders in the decision making process, which undergirds the supportive culture of an institution. This is a collaborative approach. By including a collaborative approach into all services I offer a more comprehensive and inclusive view of the internationalisation process. Internationalisation can be seen as a strategy in itself (De Wit 2009) that can be integrated into all the aspects and functions of higher education institutions and collaborate with different networks and stakeholders, thus internationalization as an approach should be inherently collaborative. The distinction proposed here is to include collaborations among formal and informal services, as well as all stakeholders, to enhance the quality of education, research and service.

In Figure 2, I offer a representation of the new added component (on the left side) of the collaborative approach, to be taken into account along all parts of the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions.
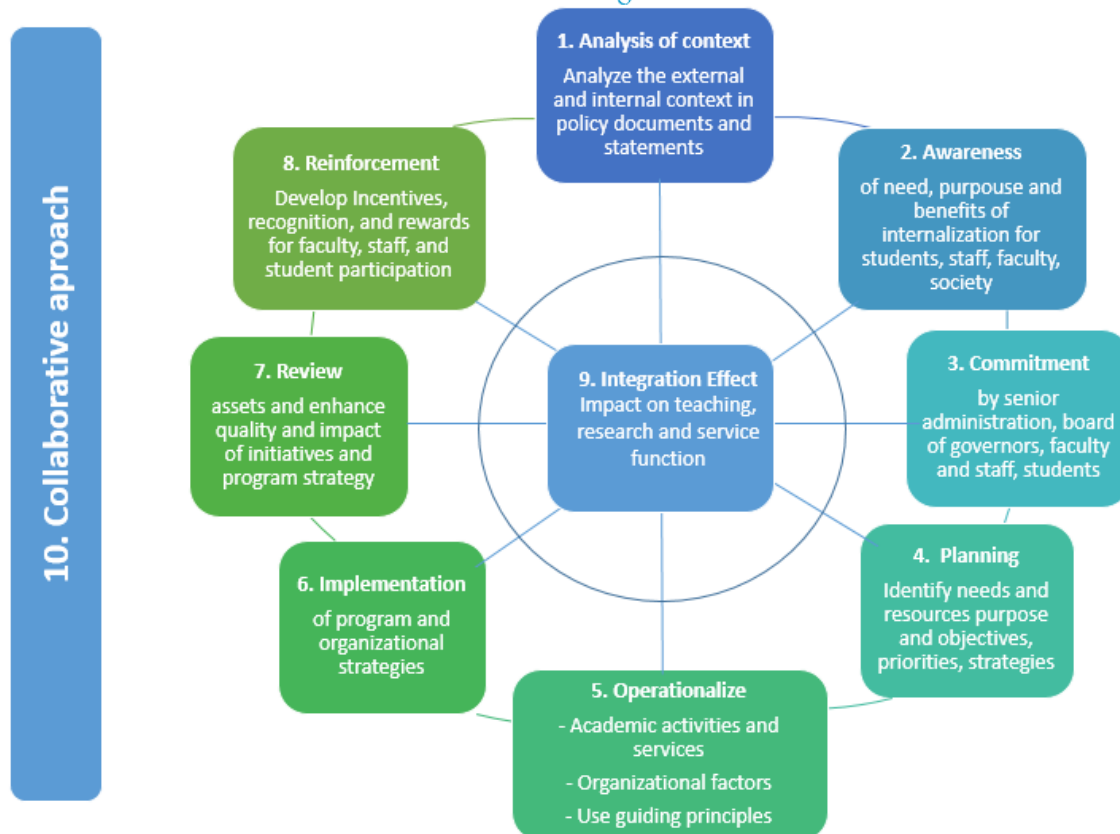
Fig. 2*: Internationalisation cycle, modified version (2017)*

1.6 Organisations acting as collaborative networks for student services

This section discusses organisations with a global and national focus on student affairs that might serve as a collaborative network to other types of support services offered internally in institutions. Indeed, there are several non-profit organisations in the world providing services and advocating for better support mechanisms for domestic students and international students alike. Additionally, private service providers may also serve as resources in some cases.

IASAS (International Association of Student Affairs and Services)

IASAS is a non-profit international organisation that started out as an informal network of higher education professionals around the world working in the area of student affairs and services. It operates at a global level and aims to provide and encourage enhanced communication and support for its members, for example by: sharing best practices; facilitating internships and exchanges; organising conferences and workshops; and supporting the global community in building new and better organisational structures for the delivery of student affairs and services.

As an organisation, IASAS acts as a global advocate for: students engaged in higher education; student affairs and services practitioners; and for the profession itself. By doing so it is: (1) providing a global platform for improving multi- and intercultural communication and understanding; (2) strengthening and diversifying cooperation between individuals and organisations working in student affairs and services worldwide; (3) promoting both the profession itself and the welfare of students at an international level through advocacy with governmental and higher education organisations; and finally (4) providing consultation and advisory services for government organisations, university leaders, student services staff and graduate students. (information gathered in IASAS website(http://iasas.global/), 2016).

NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education)

NASPA is the leading association for the advancement, health and sustainability of the student affairs profession. It provides programmes, experiences and services that cultivate student learning and success in concert with the mission of colleges and universities. It was established in 1918 and founded in 1919. NASPA is comprised of more than 15,000 members in all 50 states, 25 countries, and 8 U.S. Territories. Its mission is to be the principal source of leadership, scholarship, professional development and advocacy for student affairs (information gathered in NASPA website (https://www.naspa.org/), 2016).

ECSTA

ECSTA is the European Council for Student Affairs. It is an independent and autonomous umbrella organisation that aims to promote the social infrastructure at all higher education institutions of Europe. ECSTA was established as result of growing cooperation between student services organisations in Europe. ECSTA's vision is a European higher education area with strong student service organisations, providing quality services for the social and economic wellbeing of all students, respecting diversity and learning from each other.

To turn this vision into reality, ECSTA's missions are:
- To promote the social infrastructure within higher education institutions
- To promote cooperation between organisations responsible for this sector
- To be a contact and advisory body for the European Commission, European Council of Ministers and international , such as UNESCO, Council of Europe, and others

(information gathered in ECSTA website (http://ecsta.org/), 2017)

CNOUS

CNOUS is the national student-services agency in France. CNOUS serves students in the following areas, among them food service, housing, grants, social and cultural programmes, and international travel and awareness. (information gathered from CNOUS website (http://www.campusfrance.org/en/site/cnous-national-student-services-agency), 2016)

Studentenwerke

This is an umbrella student services organisation in Germany and is the guarantor of the German higher education system. It offers support and advice to some 2.2 million students at more than 300 higher education institutions in about 200 locations and takes care of social, economic, cultural and health matters. It makes a key contribution to increased equal opportunities in higher education, helps to improve the framework conditions for studying, thereby making studying more efficient, helps higher education institutions to develop their profiles and provides equivalent services for all students, regardless of the size, type or location of the higher education institution. (information gathered from studentenwerke website (http://www.studentenwerke.de/), 2017)

ISANA

ISANA is the representative body for professionals in Australia and has a sister organisation, ISANA New Zealand. Both work in international student services, advocacy, teaching and policy development in international education.

Mission Statement

ISANA: International Education Association is an association of Australian and New Zealand international education professionals whose members are dedicated to the advancement of international education through leadership, promotion and advocacy of best practice standards in the service of international education by facilitating the relevant forums, training and information exchange for its membership and the community; and by working

in partnership with stakeholder organisations, including international students, educational, government, business and community groups

Objectives
ISANA aims to assist those who are directly and professionally engaged in the provision of international education services. It does this by (1) providing a means for the exchange of information and networking; (2) facilitating the professional development of members; (3) building links with associated organisations locally and overseas; and (4) by recognising the interests and rights of international students in Australia and New Zealand. (information gathered from ISANA website (http://www.isana.org.au/), 2016)

1.7 Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I present an evolving concept of how internationalisation is moving towards becoming more inclusive and collaborative within the internal culture at higher education institutions. Indeed, the paper reflects on a missing component in the internationalisation cycle of higher education institutions. This is a collaborative approach that can be included as part of the internationalisation strategies to foster community engagement and more integration between students and staff members on campus.

It is important to note that internationalisation of a university is not only aimed for those mobile or foreign students but for all stakeholders playing a role in a higher education institution. In fact, it is ever more important to have an internationalisation strategy that not only focuses on programmes and actions abroad but also at home. Under the larger heading of internationalization strategy, I have identified trends in ISS in higher education institutions as falling in five major groups (Ammigan & Perez-Encinas, 2017 forthcoming): (1) more responsibility in providing immigration services; (2) a collaborative programming and outreach model; (3) key strategic communication strategies; (4) the need for assessing international student satisfaction as a way to improve support services; and (5) the preparation for managing crisis and response to emergencies. In order to follow the aforementioned trends and actions to be taken into account, the participation and work together of all stakeholders in and outside the campus is essential. For this purpose, student affairs associations in different regions of the world serve as an umbrella for emerging issues, and work to promote a social infrastructure at the higher education level.

A collaborative approach among support services at higher education institutions can enhance and strengthen the internationalisation strategy of higher education institutions by (1) identifying internationalisation needs, aims and priorities; (2) incorporating some of the activities and support services into their strategic plans; (3) integrating the view of all stakeholders of higher education institutions in all actions and activities to promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment; (4) by assessing the internationalisation plan together with stakeholders' perspectives intermittently . Thus, I propose that internationalization as an approach should be inherently collaborative between formal, informal services and all university constituents to enhance the quality of education, research and service function of the universities.

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