

# National Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education 2020–2030

“There are many routes  
to internationalisation”



A word cloud of terms related to higher education internationalisation and mobility. The most prominent words are 'internationalisation', 'mobility', 'quality', 'competences', and 'international'. Other visible terms include 'students', 'staff', 'higher education', 'intercultural', 'institutional', 'tolerance', 'public university', 'sustainability', 'private universities', 'open-minded', 'bologna process', 'diversity', 'mobility formats', 'university colleges of teacher education', 'non-traditional', 'teaching', 'ERASMUS+', 'teachers', 'recognition', 'study', 'innovative', 'digital', 'language competence', 'underrepresented', 'inclusion', 'global', 'joint programmes', 'european higher education area', 'universities of applied sciences', and 'university of applied sciences'.



### **Acknowledgements**

Publisher and owner:

Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research

Minoritenplatz 5, 1010 Vienna, Austria

[www.bmbwf.gv.at](http://www.bmbwf.gv.at)

Photos/Pictures: BMBWF/Lusser (p. 5), istock.com (p. 4, 6, 20, 23)

Vienna, September 2020

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Preface .....	5
Vision 2030 .....	7
Introduction .....	8
Goal 1: Promote an all-encompassing culture of internationalisation at higher education institutions .....	10
Goal 2: Promote mobility for all members of higher education institutions .....	12
Goal 3: Develop and implement innovative digital forms of mobility .....	14
Goal 4: Effective skills improvement and institutional learning .....	16
Goal 5: Global mindset – Austria’s higher education institutions and their position in the world .....	18
The goals in a European and national context .....	21
Monitoring .....	22



# Preface

Teaching and research geared towards internationality and the advancement and appreciation of the arts are key cornerstones of academic excellence and essential if higher education institutions are to enjoy a successful position in the global knowledge community.

These institutions are already training future leaders with a global vision, a European consciousness and an understanding of sustainable development and are thus making key contributions towards enhancing the social and economic position of a small yet competitive country. In order to continue successfully along this path, this strategy document proposes five goals to be met by 2030.

The first of these focuses on promoting a comprehensive culture of internationalisation that touches all areas of higher education. Goals two and three concern a key element of internationalisation: the mobility of higher education students, teachers and general university staff. As well as mobility in the physical sense, this is also about innovative digital forms of mobility. The fourth goal relates to quality assurance in higher education, and the fifth to Austria's higher education policy and strengthening its position in the global knowledge society.

One unique feature of this strategy is that, for the first time, it addresses all four sectors of Austria's higher education landscape – the public universities, the universities of applied sciences, the private universities and the university colleges of teacher education. The resulting diversity calls for tailored approaches to achieving the goals set, something that is also reflected in the strategy's subtitle: "Many routes to internationalisation".

I would like to take this opportunity to express my personal thanks to everyone representing Austria's higher education institutions who, in a participatory process, have made valuable contributions towards formulating this strategy that is now being presented. I would also like to invite all leadership teams, staff, teachers, researchers and students at higher education institutions to work towards implementing this strategy with great ambition and to breathe life into it through their collective endeavours.



Prof. Dr. Heinz Faßmann  
Federal Minister of Education,  
Science and Research



# Vision for 2030

Austria is an attractive place for higher education students to learn and academics to work, whether they come from this country or further afield. Its higher education institutions are home to innovative, high-quality teaching, research and the advancement and appreciation of the arts. They make a socially relevant contribution towards shaping the global knowledge society. All members of Austrian higher education institutions have embraced internationality as a fundamental guiding principle of their work and activities and are striving to further advance internationalisation. Besides physical mobility, making sensible use of digital information and communications technologies, in particular, also facilitates dialogue across national borders. Higher education students acquire advanced specialist and methodological knowledge and international and intercultural skills; they speak several languages and learn how to think independently, critically and innovatively. As the workforce of the future, they are ideally equipped to act responsibly in globally interconnected worlds of work and living environments and are making a fundamental contribution to the country's competitiveness.

# Introduction

We are living in an age of globalisation – in the “global village” – and national and international changes in the economy, society and environment are all having a global impact.

Increasingly, solutions put forward by individual governments are not enough to solve national crises, conflicts and problems. International cooperation takes many forms and, in many areas, is now more essential than ever before. This applies in particular to higher education institutions, which – as centres for the generation and sharing of knowledge – make key contributions to overcoming crises, conflicts and problems, be this through discovering new research insights, providing scientifically sound advice to decision-makers or training future leaders with international vision.

Networking and dialogue with international partners have been part of everyday life at Austria’s higher education institutions for decades. For instance, collaboration as part of the Bologna Process and participation in the European Union’s education programmes such as Erasmus+ have proved themselves valuable in this respect. Greater internationalisation will be the key to success if Austria’s global profile as a centre for higher education is to be raised in the future.

This strategy is based on an understanding of internationalisation that has been described as an “internationalisation of the curriculum”. This is a holistic approach to the internationalisation of study and teaching that was formulated by the Australian Betty Leask, an academic and expert in education. “Internationalisation” for the purposes of this strategy means a process geared towards integrating global, international and intercultural dimensions into the objectives and content of higher education and into its entire teaching and learning environment. Internationalisation thus touches all levels of higher education institutions and, for instance, is reflected in course content and teaching methods with an international focus, assessment criteria, measures to promote mobility, the values and standards embraced at the institution, financing decisions or staff development processes. Put simply, internationalisation permeates all areas of higher education institutions and involves all of their members.

The members of higher education institutions – and thus the strategy’s main target group – are therefore their students, teachers and general (non-academic) staff. Aspects of internationalisation that relate to research are primarily covered by the Austrian government’s “Strategy for Research, Technology and Innovation”, although doctoral students are included in the present strategy. Students who are employed as pre-docs at universities while working on their doctorates need to be paid particular attention. As



well as higher education institutions, the strategy is also targeted at the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) themselves.

**Rather than being an end in itself, internationalisation generates tangible added value at individual, institutional and societal levels.**

As well as continuing to develop specialist expertise, the focus at the individual level also lies on acquiring international and intercultural skills such as: language skills; networked, critical and innovative thinking; the ability to reflect and communicate across cultures; and a nuanced global vision. At institutional level, greater internationality makes higher education institutions more attractive to international students and researchers, improves their teaching, expands their partnerships and improves their international visibility and reputation, amongst other things. Actively embracing internationality at higher education institutions also impacts positively on society as a whole by helping to open people's minds, boost solidarity and break down prejudices and by strengthening and further increasing the innovative clout and competitiveness of Austria as a place to do business.

This strategy document considers public universities, universities of applied sciences, private universities and university colleges of teacher education, thereby covering all four higher education sectors in Austria. Each sector has very different remits, ways of working and framework conditions. Individual higher education institutions also differ in terms of the priorities they set and, in the past, have afforded internationalisation varying degrees of prominence.

With each institution thus starting from a different position, it would not make sense to pick a one-size-fits-all approach for implementing the strategy. Rather, internationalisation efforts need to be pursued individually. For this reason, the mobility and internationalisation strategy for higher education contains five overarching strategic goals, each with several objectives for implementation, which set out the strategic focus for the years to 2030. Within each strategic goal, higher education institutions are expected to select several objectives for implementation in line with their own profiles and their individual strengths and weaknesses. Taking account of their different starting points, the institutions are called on to be ambitious. It is up to each one to decide what actual measures to implement in order to achieve its objectives.

## Goal 1

# Promote an all-encompassing culture of internationalisation at higher education institutions

Introducing an internal internationalisation strategy that integrates a clear commitment to internationalisation in a tangible framework is a major first step towards creating a sustainable culture of internationalisation that is embedded within the higher education institution concerned.

Formulating and further developing a strategy of this kind requires the institution to look in detail at its medium- to long-term aims and the requirements and potential for internationalisation. Efficient processes of internationalisation also call for stable structures in order to implement the chosen measures as well as adequate provision of resources and a quality management system. Ideally, therefore, an internationalisation strategy will be developed with the involvement of all the members of the higher education institution. This is because the strategy can only be implemented successfully if everyone involved shares a common understanding.

Another key approach to establishing a culture of internationalisation is to introduce international and intercultural elements and course content into curricula and

### Objectives for implementation

- (Further) develop an internationalisation strategy, involving all members of higher education and focusing particularly on increasing quality and efficiency. Monitor the targets set based on predefined indicators. The further development work done at the university colleges of teacher education is also to be coordinated within their dedicated networks.
- Embed the all-encompassing approach to internationalising study and teaching in all the higher education institution's development plans and strategies.
- Expand the number of courses taught in a foreign language and foreign-language degree programmes, particularly at universities of applied sciences.
- Expand the number of language learning courses available to teachers and higher education staff.

the teaching and learning environment in line with the holistic understanding of the internationalisation of study and teaching (“internationalisation of the curriculum”) as well as, for example, the creation of mobility windows. All measures geared towards creating an international environment at one’s own higher education institution have been grouped together under the “Internationalisation@Home” umbrella. They include offering an attractive range of courses taught in a foreign language as well as language learning courses, research fields with an international focus, getting international teachers more involved, providing high-quality interaction with foreign higher education students and fostering a welcoming culture for incoming students and teachers. Under no circumstances, however, can Internationalisation@Home replace actual experience of mobility abroad under any circumstances – nor must it be allowed to. Rather, it represents an additional component of the internationalisation of study and teaching and thus makes an important contribution towards the all-encompassing approach to internationalisation.

One way for a higher education institution to strengthen its international outlook is to partner with institutions in other countries as part of a joint programme, under which two or more international higher education institutions work together to design and teach a curriculum. Joint programmes are an excellent way to foster high-quality, long-term collaboration.

The Erasmus+ initiative of the European Universities aims to create an even more efficient format for cross-border cooperation. The European Universities are an association of several higher education institutions from member states entitled to participate fully in the Erasmus+ programme. These institutions are cooperating to an unprecedented extent on teaching and research and the creation of an inter-university campus. Various models for this pioneering form of collaboration are currently being piloted.

- Take greater account of international and intercultural aspects in recruitment and staff development processes such as staff appraisals.
- Acknowledge particular engagement with Internationalisation@Home as part of teachers’ career development.
- Introduce measures to increase attractiveness for foreign higher education students and teachers and improve the welcoming culture for incoming students and teachers.
- Expand international cooperation by extending the range of joint programmes.
- Increase the number of joint programmes at public universities and universities of applied sciences.
- Enter the tenders run by the European Union as part of the European University Initiative.

## Goal 2

# Promote mobility for all members of higher education institutions

Mobility is regarded as a core element of internationalisation, because a stay abroad is a particularly effective way to acquire international and intercultural skills.

The aim is therefore to enable as many members of higher education institutions as possible to experience such mobility. Finding your way and organising your life in an initially unknown environment is a valuable experience. For this reason, the aim is to increase participation in structured mobility programmes and to encourage and enhance mobility under existing partnerships between higher education institutions. As well as higher education students, this also applies in particular to teachers and higher education staff. The added value brought by teachers' experiences of mobility also lies in the further development of their own teaching and in improving their foreign language skills. In the past, non-academic staff at higher education institutions have been somewhat ignored by measures designed to promote mobility. This is unfortunate in that they play an essential part in helping to shape the culture of a higher education institution and make a vital contribution to Internationalisation@Home.

Amongst higher education students – a heterogeneous group – even more focus will have to be placed in future on those who have so far been under-represented on

### Objectives for implementation

- Expand the mobility of teachers under existing partnerships and/or structured mobility programmes through internal incentive and recognition schemes within each higher education institution.
- Promote the mobility of higher education staff, e.g. by providing more information on the opportunities to spend time abroad on continuing professional development that are provided for in European education programmes.
- Make mobility windows an integral part of degree programmes for which they seem expedient.
- Increase mobility for members of under-represented groups of students, particularly by providing more advice and support.
- Expand the grant system to provide better financial support to under-represented groups of students.
- Improve the statistical recording of under-represented groups so that the

the mobility front according to student social surveys. This includes all those higher education students who are already poorly represented when they enter higher education, such as those from low-education households, as well as groups of students with specific requirements, such as working students, students with caring responsibilities and students with a physical disability. As well as better advice on support options, these groups will also require more generous funding. In addition, the mobility figures are particularly low for student groups in certain disciplines, who could also be helped by introducing specific mobility windows in curricula.

Two other groups that should also gain more experience abroad as part of their education are trainee teachers and doctoral students. The former are especially important given the role they will play as multipliers in their future career. As soon-to-be teachers, they will be working in an increasingly diverse environment with many schoolchildren from a migration background. It is therefore particularly important for this group to experience mobility during their education in order to consolidate their intercultural skills and take a critical look at culture and society through their own and other people's eyes.

Meanwhile, a stay abroad is important for doctoral students' career development as it allows them to make new contacts and build up a professional network.

Besides the traditional semester abroad for higher education students, the range of high-quality, non-traditional forms of mobility – including shorter stays – must be expanded. These include internships relevant to a student's degree, excursions, residential research trips as part of dissertations or theses, language learning courses, summer/winter schools, concert tours and masterclasses abroad. Shorter formats are more feasible, particularly for members of under-represented groups.

effectiveness of the measures taken can be better evaluated.

- Increase the percentage of trainee teachers who have experienced mobility as part of their education. This applies to soon-to-be teachers of all subjects, not just foreign languages.
- Promote mobility amongst doctoral students.
- Expand the range of non-traditional forms of mobility available and improve

the information provided on existing options.

- Place greater emphasis on ECTS credits obtained abroad when determining the “examination intensity” of degree courses for the purposes of university funding.
- Provide more information on the services currently offered by the BMBWF and OeAD for promoting residential study and research trips.

## Goal 3

# Develop and implement innovative digital forms of mobility

Besides the shorter and non-traditional forms of physical mobility addressed as part of the second goal, virtual forms of mobility in particular will become more important in the future.

However, new forms of mobility are not intended in any way to replace traditional physical mobility. Rather, they are designed to be a useful addition and permit the involvement of people at higher education institutions who are unable to be mobile for whatever reason.

As part of Internationalisation@Home efforts, national borders can be dismantled in the virtual space and intercultural and international skills can be generated that, in an ideal scenario, will at least be almost comparable with those produced through physical mobility. Consolidating language skills and tackling new course content also makes Internationalisation@Home a valuable tool. Furthermore, new competences such as digital communication skills, flexibility, teamwork and creativity are given an especially strong boost.

### Objectives for implementation

- Develop a concept for all groups of people who are members of higher education institutions to make greater use of high-quality virtual mobility.
- Develop and implement virtual concepts for cross-border collaboration in higher education.
- Develop and trial hybrid physical/virtual forms of mobility and create new forms of international cooperation.
- Ensure that all members of higher education institutions can take advantage of the opportunities presented by digitalisation, e.g. by installing modern IT equipment at the institution and making appropriate software available.

Currently, a distinction is essentially drawn between two kinds of innovative digital mobility: (purely) virtual mobility and hybrid forms of virtual and physical mobility. The latter are also known as “blended mobility” concepts. Examples of purely virtual mobility include working on inter-university projects, designing and teaching courses jointly, and using information and communication technology to write seminar papers in international teams. Blended mobility concepts focus on complementing physical mobility with virtual mobility in a meaningful way. Examples include working on a joint project in which the people involved meet face to face at the beginning and end but otherwise collaborate via digital communication tools, or linguistic preparation for a term abroad at a Higher Education Institution where a different language is spoken.

These examples merely provide a snapshot of the current situation, however. The onward march of digitalisation and the expansion of what is technically possible will also lead to the continued development of innovative forms of mobility. Because many such possibilities cannot yet be predicted, we need to track new trends, remain open to innovations and be willing to experiment. Higher education institutions will undoubtedly need to expand their IT infrastructure in order to be equipped for changes in user behaviour.

- Be open to new digital developments and exchange ideas and opinions with other higher education institutions regarding innovative applications for virtual mobility.
- Expand IT infrastructure to be equipped for greater adoption of digital forms of mobility.

## Goal 4

# Effective skills improvement and institutional learning

If internationalisation measures are to be designed to be as effective as possible for members of higher education institutions, the objectives to be achieved must be clearly defined.

Ideally, this will be done when each institution devises its internal internationalisation and mobility strategy (see the first goal). In terms of higher education students, the focus is on the international and intercultural skills that are to be integrated transparently into curricula and acquired or reinforced through mobility. Internationalisation measures that concern teachers or general staff are to be reflected in staff development processes.

The efficiency of individual mobility experiences must also be ensured, with particular focus on the accompanying measures before, during and after the experience. Although much has already improved in terms of how students' achievements abroad are recognised and counted towards their overall performance, work still needs to be done. The handling of mobility processes needs to be simplified and less bureaucratic. Here too, greater use needs to be made of the opportunities presented by digitalisation.

### Objectives for implementation

- Integrate international and intercultural skills into all curricula, but particularly those for master's degrees and doctorates.
- Develop quality-assured processes to incorporate individual learning experiences at the institutional level.
- Expand the advice provided before a mobility experience, the support given during it and the follow-up done after it.



To leverage maximum added value from a mobility experience, its benefit cannot be allowed to be restricted to the purely individual level. In particular, the experience gained by teachers and staff at the higher education institution must flow back into the institution itself to a greater extent so that it can benefit as a whole. Applications for this institutional form of learning include feeding teachers' new insights into innovative teaching methods back into teaching work and introducing new ideas learnt during job shadowing in order to improve organisational processes. This requires the higher education institution to find a way of collating, evaluating and integrating individual experiences. If it succeeds, it will have made a major contribution towards building up its capacity.

The institution's quality management plays a key role in all the measures listed above. It focuses on optimising processes and the internal structure in order to meet the quality-oriented objectives set. Regularly evaluating progress made towards meeting targets and adjusting processes if necessary will bring about lasting improvements in the quality of a higher education institution's performance.

To increase the value added by internationalisation and mobility measures, the exchange of experiences between Austrian higher education institutions on successful measures and challenges and potential risks in international cooperation can and must be strengthened. On behalf of the BMBWF, the OeAD will be creating an online exchange platform for examples of best practice in internationalisation and mobility measures in order to support nationwide dialogue between the institutions. This will be available from mid-2021 onwards ([www.hmis2030.at](http://www.hmis2030.at)).

- Improve how students' achievements abroad are recognised and counted towards their overall performance.
- Sign the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.
- Use the national online exchange platform for examples of best practice in internationalisation and mobility measures.

## Goal 5

# Global Mindset – Austria’s higher education institutions and their position in the world

Whilst the mobility of students, teachers and higher education staff within the European Union has been simplified by the principle of free movement of persons and is supported to a significant extent by the Erasmus+ programme amongst other things, citizens of non-member states face a much bigger challenge.

Here too, greater use needs to be made of the opportunities presented by digitalisation in order to cut red tape. The overarching aim is to streamline the processes required to take up an academic post in Austria, complete a joint programme or carry out teaching assignments. A framework needs to be created that will give Austria visibility as an attractive centre for higher education.

This also includes ensuring that well-qualified students from non-EU countries who have completed a joint programme or doctorate in Austria have easier access to the Austrian job market in the future. These graduates are an important human resource,

### Objectives for implementation

- Simplify the entry and residency requirements for international higher education students, teachers and academics from non-EU countries.
  - Work on reforming the Red-White-Red Card together with the other federal ministries responsible (including the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and the Austrian Federal
- Ministry for European and International Affairs (BMEIA) to make it easier for graduates from joint programmes and doctoral students from non-EU countries to find jobs in Austria.
- Reform and expand the OeAD’s grant programmes, focusing particularly on doctoral students.

which is why it would be desirable from an economic point of view if they were to stay in Austria. At the same time, however, those graduates who leave the country after graduating must not dismantle the bridges linking them with their former host universities in Austria. Instead, they need to keep in touch so that the institutions can provide contacts for potential academic collaboration further down the line.

Expanding the grant programmes offered by the OeAD and further developing their content is another important element of an open and modern outlook for Austria's higher education policy. Focus must be placed on supporting highly qualified doctoral students in this regard, as they play a significant role in the country's capacity for innovation. Better opportunities for grants to be co-financed by the private sector need to be created, particularly in highly promising fields of research in which greater demand for key personnel is expected on the labour market.

Cooperation with higher education institutions in developing countries also needs to be strengthened as a contribution to international knowledge transfer. The Austrian government's foreign policy priorities and efforts made to leverage synergy effects with Austrian development cooperation need to be taken even more into consideration in the future. Greater engagement in the field of sustainability also demonstrates how Austria is taking global responsibility. Many Austrian higher education institutions are setting a good example in this area and are already making important contributions towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The newly established network "Africa-UniNet" is a shining example of how cooperation with developing countries can be combined with engagement on sustainability issues.

- Create new opportunities for grants to be co-financed by the private sector, particularly for future key personnel.
- Implement measures to strengthen the ties between international graduates and their former host university in Austria.
- Make use of the Europe-wide EURAX-ESS Services Network.
- Get higher education institutions more involved in Africa-UniNet.
- Optimise the marketing of Austria as a centre for higher education.



# The goals in a European and national context

With its goals, the mobility and internationalisation strategy for higher education fits very well into the current debate at European level. In particular, its all-encompassing approach to internationalisation and focus on learning and sharing more international and intercultural skills align with the prevailing understanding of internationalisation in higher education.

For some time now, strategic policy documents published by the European Union and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have also increasingly referenced this approach. Worth special emphasis here is, for instance, the Paris Communiqué from the 2018 EHEA Ministerial Conference, which stresses the social responsibility that higher education institutions have to teach intercultural understanding, civic engagement and ethical awareness.

Closer links between the EHEA and the European Research Area are also becoming more important, as are synergy effects between the EU's education and research programmes. In addition, guidelines for international cooperation are currently being formulated that point out potential challenges and risks involved in collaborating with non-member states and make recommendations for countering them.

Promoting mobility and international cooperation has always been at the heart of the EU's Erasmus+ programme, and this will remain the case in the programme's next incarnation spanning 2021–2027. This provides greater support to innovative concepts for new forms of collaboration such as the European Universities.

The expansion of virtual mobility and blended mobility concepts outlined in the strategy also reflects the new mobility patterns recommended in the Bologna Digital 2020 – White Paper on the Digitalisation in the Higher Education Area.

In a national context, this strategy and the priorities it sets will help to meet the federal government's budgetary impact targets. The second of these, regarding science and research, sets out a scale for "Creating an internationally competitive higher education and research area that is coordinated nationwide in terms of teaching and research". Specifically, it calls for an "improvement in the framework conditions for the mobility of students, teachers and researchers" and "setting up university-level partnerships with universities, non-university institutions and the private sector at national and EU level". The first, second and fifth goals of the mobility and internationalisation strategy for higher education in particular will make a key contribution to this.

# Monitoring

With the various higher education institutions starting from different points, the progress made in implementing the mobility and internationalisation strategy for higher education is chiefly to be monitored by the institutions' own quality management teams. Qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be set in order to assess whether the objectives for implementation chosen by the respective institutions are being achieved. This is also to be done individually at the institutional level.

Using the various steering instruments at the BMBWF's disposal, however, the ambition that each higher education institution is showing towards implementing the strategy will be evaluated and, if appropriate, the objectives for implementation selected by the institution will be made binding.

The BMBWF will prepare an interim report in 2024 on the progress made with implementing this strategy.



innovative teaching internationalisation intercultural  
private bologna process  
universities institutional  
joint programmes students sustainability university colleges of teacher education tolerance higher education staff  
mobility diversity ERASMUS+ quality recognition inclusion european higher education area  
international non-traditional competences study mobility formats open-minded global  
language competence underrepresented digital