



# **The Benefits and Challenges of Internationalisation/Europeanisation Strategies for Educational Institutions**

**Statistical Report from the Online Survey**

15.02.2016

## Are you active in the education sector but have not yet internationalised?

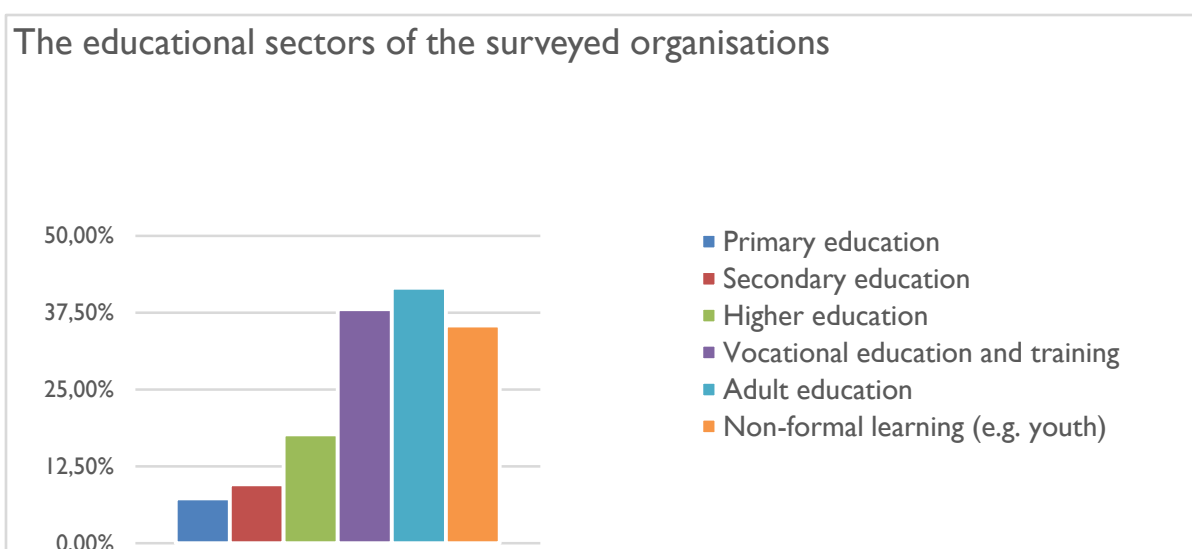
Do you work as a teacher or trainer and are interested in gaining some international experience for yourself or your learners? Do you manage an educational organisation and aim to internationalise your activities? Is your organisation already *on its way* to internationalisation but you have observed some resistance to change or obstacles which hinder you from implementing this internationalisation strategy? Are you as an individual enthusiastic and keen on such a strategy but your colleagues aren't? Do they instead show some anxiety and hostility, arguing that such a strategy would negatively interfere with their day-to-day work? Are you rather sceptical and think that the challenges of *becoming international* would outweigh any potential benefits? Between May and July 2015, 520 people were surveyed in order to evaluate their beliefs about the relevance and impact of *internationalisation* and *Europeanisation* strategies for their educational organisations. This report contains a brief presentation of this survey, the results of which should help you to make up your own mind.

### About the survey

The survey was conducted online and contained 57 questions. The target group was made up of managers and teaching personnel from all of the educational sectors: primary education, secondary education, higher education, vocational education and training (VET), adult education and even the non-formal education sector e.g. youth. The survey was completed in more than 30 countries, including all of the EU member states. The survey was conducted by seven independent organisations who piloted the project “Organisational Maturity Assessment Tool for the Europeanisation of Educational Institutions” (short: “Europeanisation”) funded by the European Union Erasmus+ programme. The survey has therefore focused more on the process of *Europeanisation*, but its results are equally applicable to *internationalisation* strategies. Alongside an investigation of the profiles of the participants, the survey mainly focusses on the *benefits and challenges of Europeanisation strategies*. The survey also contains valuable information for managers, detailing the *areas within their organisation which would be most impacted by international activities*.

## Profile of the participants: 87.5% were already active on an international level

Although the survey was not representative, it shows that the majority of the participants are already familiar with international or European work. 48% of them had been personally involved in international activities for longer than six years, and 87.5% of their organisations were already involved in such activities. In addition, 48% of the organisations also regularly use one or more of the following European standards: *EQF*, *ECVET*, *CEFR*, *Europass*, *Youthpass*. Only 34% of the surveyed respondents had never been involved in a project supported by the European Union, a so-called *EU project*, one example being the Erasmus+ programme.



When asked *what percentage of their daily work they would consider to be international*, about one-third of the participants answered more than 50%, and roughly one-half answered more than 25%. As to the type of education provided by participants, most of them represented the VET and adult education sector, but one-third were active in the *non-formal learning* sector such as youth work. 18% worked in the *higher education* sector, and 17% in *primary or secondary education* sectors.

## The benefits of internationalisation/Europeanisation: It's not just about the money

The results of the survey show a clear correlation between the experience of the participants (or their organisations) on the international level and their belief in the possible benefits that such work brings: the more a person commits to international activities, the more they are aware of the benefits associated with these actions.

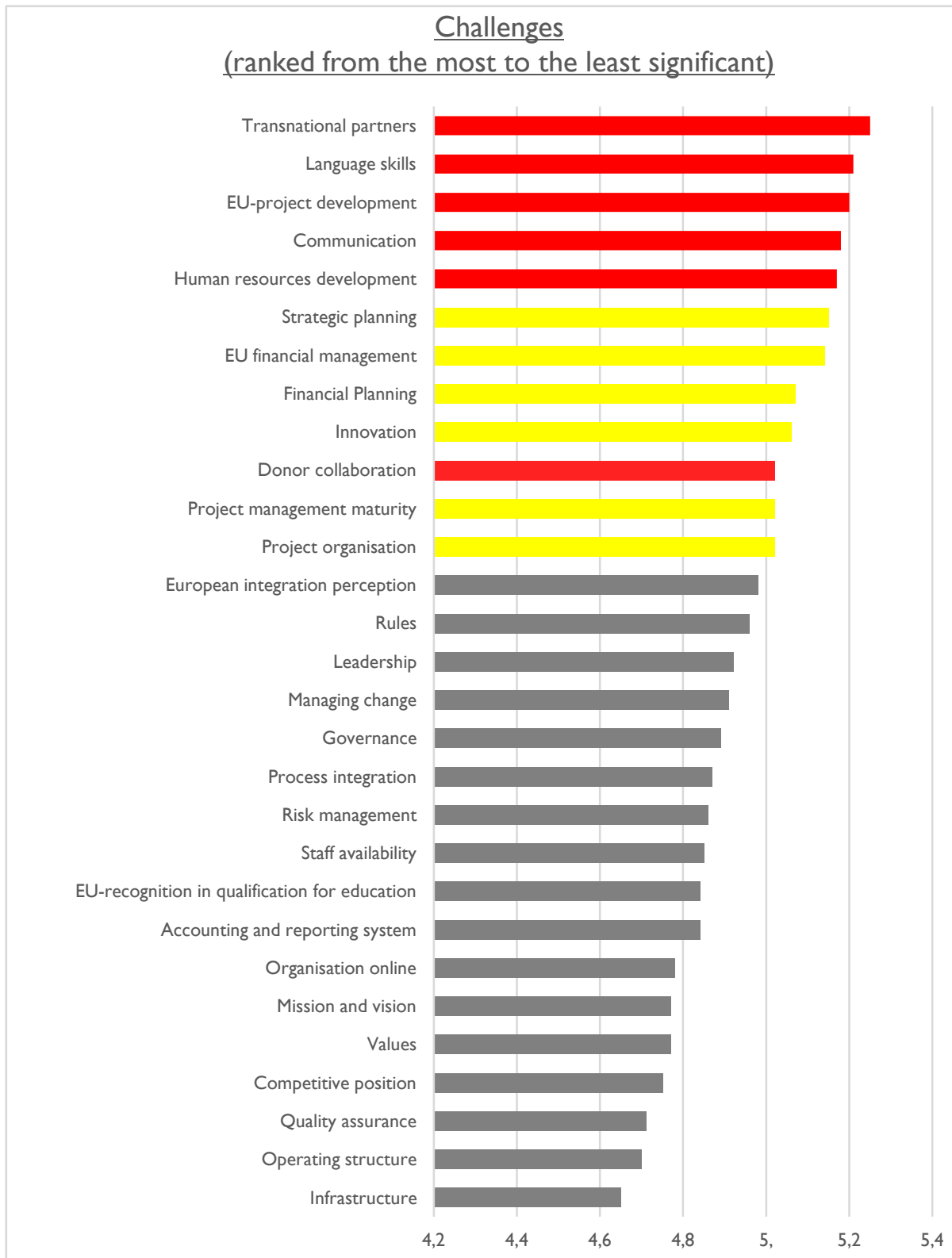
One of the most striking results is that the 176 participants *who had never participated in an EU project* generally had the opposite approach to their counterparts. They are less persuaded about the following potential benefits: *new skills for staff and learners, new knowledge, development of new products/services, new funding sources, enhancement of an organisation’s reputation, etc.* The two most important benefits according to the participants were *new skills for staff and learners* (ranked 1<sup>st</sup>) and *accessing new and important knowledge through networking* (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>). In relation to these two primary benefits, it is remarkable that if an organisation has participated in at least one EU project, the positivity of their perception increases on average from 82% to 88%. For organisations which have participated in more than six EU projects, this perception can increase up to 90%! The survey therefore suggests a clear correlation, expressed in the following words: *the more that people and organisations participate in or implement EU projects, the more they are convinced or aware of the benefits of these projects, particularly in terms of the development of their knowledge and skills.* On average, the *intangible* benefits (*new skills, new knowledge, enhancement of an organisation’s reputation*) are ranked highest, whereas the *tangible* benefits are usually secondary: *New funding sources* are ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, *access to new markets* is 5<sup>th</sup>, *development of new products or services* is 6<sup>th</sup> and *risk sharing* is 7<sup>th</sup>. Another key finding which arose from the survey is that people who spend most (more than 75%) of their time working internationally generally have a very positive opinion concerning *all* the suggested benefits (both *tangible* and *intangible*). In other words, people who already work in internationalised positions *are more aware* of the benefits of internationalisation/Europeanisation strategies.



## The challenges of internationalisation/Europeanisation: usually related to unskilled staff or inappropriate project management practices

What are the biggest challenges an educational organisation is confronted with when it deploys (or *intends to deploy*) an internationalisation/Europeanisation strategy? This was another key question asked to the 520 participants. The question led to a list of 29 possible challenges, divided into 10

organisational areas: *strategy; culture, beliefs and values; core mission and vision; operating structure; human resources; infrastructure and technology; working processes; project management practices; finances and financial management practices; external relations.* The following ranking of the 29 challenges from most to least important shows the results. According to the participants, international work would



involve considerable challenges for their *project management practices* (including the challenge of *developing projects eligible for EU funding*, which is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, the *need to demonstrate organisational project management maturity* and the *need to establish an international project organisation*, ranked 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> respectively). Above all, the participants believed that international activities would challenge their *human resources*: this category included *insufficient language skills* and the *requirement to train staff in accordance with European requirements*, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively. The other biggest concerns were the challenge of finding *reliable international partners for cooperation* (1<sup>st</sup>) and *using adequate forms of communication* (4<sup>th</sup>). The participants also expressed their worries about the *need to reorient the organisation's specific goals, priorities and strategies* (6<sup>th</sup>), *insufficient ability for EU financial management or financial planning* (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) and the *need for innovation* in order to maintain a difference from other competing internationalised educational organisations (9<sup>th</sup>).

## Let's go Europe! But where should I begin?

If you decide to *internationalise* or *Europeanise* your educational institution, it is easy to feel at first overwhelmed by this ambitious plan. This feeling could arise out of or be reinforced by the *transversal nature* of the plan: your internationalisation strategy could potentially influence every area of your organisation. But here is the key: they will not all be influenced to the *same extent*, and not even necessarily at the *same time*. Mrs Ulrike Schröder from the National Agency of Erasmus+ in Germany (NA-BiBB) has reached this same conclusion: "Internationalisation can start at different points. [...] It is not always a good idea to tackle every single issue at the same time" (original quote: *Internationalisierung kann an unterschiedlichen Stellen ansetzen. [...] Nicht immer ist es sinnvoll, alle Aspekte gleichzeitig anzupacken*), quoted from her article "Internationalisierung in Erasmus+" in the Journal of the National Agency, December 2015, Nr. 23 / 2015: International und strategisch aufgestellt. That's easy to say, but where should I begin? The survey indirectly answered this question when it identified the organisational areas most *influenced* by the Europeanisation process. According to the 520 participants, the areas most *influenced* by international activities are the *project management practices* of the organisation (ranked 1<sup>st</sup>) and its *strategy* (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>). The *organisation's culture, beliefs and values* were then ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, *finance and financial management* 4<sup>th</sup> and *external relations* 5<sup>th</sup>. The area seen as most influenced by international activities (*project management practices*) received an average score of 44% from those who voted. Interestingly enough, this score increased to 55% for people who spend more than 75% of their time working internationally. Conversely, those with no EU project experience generally did not perceive *project management* as an area influenced by international activities (-18 points in comparison with those who had EU project experience). This therefore shows a positive correlation between the degree of familiarity with

international or EU projects and the awareness of the impact these project have on *project management practices*. In general, the top 5 areas were perceived in different ways by the participants depending on their profiles. Rural organisations, for example, paid more attention to *finance and financial management* than urban organisations, whereas organisations representing the primary and secondary education sectors considered *culture, beliefs and values* as the area most impacted by international activities.



The terms “impacted” or “influenced” were used in the survey to suggest a *passive approach* to the process of internationalisation / Europeanisation. It is possible to contrast this *passive approach* with a more *proactive approach*: these five areas can also be understood as the top 5 *key enablers* of a Europeanisation strategy for your organisation. Admittedly, all these areas are complex and require long-term and ongoing effort (such as changing *culture, beliefs and values*) or some specific recruitment or staff training measures (such as changing *project management practices*). Tackle these issues one at a time. Before recruiting new members of staff, first investigate if your working partners have some international background or experience, if they are proficient in a foreign language, or if they are familiar with international standards – for example in the area of *project management*. Start also by browsing some existing international and European platforms, databases and social networks in order to internationalise your *external relations*. Note that the European Commission has created and maintains a considerable list of diverse online networking tools.

## Conclusion: Internationalisation/Europeanisation with or without EU funding!

Overall, the survey has managed to identify the four major benefits of internationalisation/Europeanisation for European educational organisations: *development of new skills for staff and learners; access to new and important knowledge; new sources of funding; and enhancement of the organisation's reputation*. The survey has also shown that the biggest obstacles arise from project management practices, the competencies of staff, and identifying and communicating with international partners. Interestingly enough, the survey has also shown that the *organisational areas most influenced by international activities* are linked to these biggest obstacles, the best examples being *project management practices, finances and human resources*. It is precisely because of this that we suggest turning these obstacles into *key enablers*, such as weakness-opportunity strategy proposed by SWOT in which an individual should<sup>1</sup>: “overcome weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities”. Of course, organisations can also choose to take the opposite strategy (*strength-opportunity strategy*) and use their primary resources to take advantage of opportunities.

Whatever an organisation's strategy, EU projects seem to be assets for educational organisations. The survey identifies not only one but several correlations, all of which indicate that EU projects can provide positive support for an organisation's internationalisation and Europeanisation strategies:

- Firstly, EU projects seem to help organisations and their members to *better perceive the benefits* of such strategies, in particular the *intangible benefits* linked to *knowledge and skills*.
- Secondly, EU projects might also reduce the fear that newcomers have of being unable to *develop projects eligible for EU funding* (a challenge which was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>) or their worries about *EU financial management* (ranked 7<sup>th</sup>).
- Thirdly, doing EU projects should also help when *finding reliable organisations to work with*, which was ranked as the most significant challenge. In fact, EU projects offer the opportunity to meet other organisations and assess how compatible they are with your own organisation. EU projects therefore provide an excellent foundation for further reliable bilateral or multilateral cooperation.
- Fourthly, EU projects can act as the impetus for the modernisation of an organisation's *project management practices*. Research indicates that organisations with greater levels of

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<sup>1</sup> **SWOT** is an acronym for **s**trengths, **w**eaknesses, **o**pportunities, and **t**hreats. It is a structured planning method that evaluates those four elements of a project or an organisation.



project management maturity are more likely to achieve better project effectiveness and efficiency, and consequently have a more competitive advantage in the marketplace<sup>2</sup>. Even if it is the case, as some researchers claim, that the actual contribution of project management maturity models to organisational development remains somewhat unclear, organisations can use their experience in EU projects as a key facilitator of further growth.

That being said, participating in EU projects is only *one* way to begin. There are many other ways to start an internationalisation strategy which are not linked to EU funding. For some organisations, the process will be built on a range of bilateral cooperation (between two countries) supported by their own funds or other external sources of funding not connected to EU programmes. For others, the European Union Erasmus+ programme remains *the* main programme for institutions from all educational sectors who want to implement EU projects. Organisations who have no experience of the programme (*newcomers*) have as much chance as those who are more experienced, since the EU has set in place several very ambitious goals: supporting 125,000 institutions between 2014 and 2020 as part of Strategic Partnerships (KA2), ensuring the mobility of 2 million students in higher education, and even enabling 650,000 vocational students and 800,000 lecturers, teachers, trainers, education workers and youth workers to learn, teach and train abroad (KA1).

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<sup>2</sup> See: Backlund F.; Chronéer D.; Sundqvist E. (2014): Project Management Maturity Models – A Critical Review: A Case Study within Swedish Engineering and Construction Organizations. Lulea University of Technology, Industrial Engineering and Management, Sweden.