



STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
A College of Queen's University Belfast

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Introduction

Growing globalisation necessitates the development of an international perspective to and within education. Improved communications have enabled access to international perspectives, standards and approaches in almost every walk of life. Universities have been at the centre of the development of internationalisation almost from their conception. The evaluation of education is now a global issue with league tables reflecting standing in the world. Universities should not expect to be exempt from worldwide movements but to be standard bearers for the development of an international paradigm underpinning their work. Even in intellectual fields which are by definition localised, standards have become, in the last decade, a matter of both national and international concern.

In 1992 the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) invited the then Stranmillis College to consider how it would “ventilate” its teacher education. The University College embraced Erasmus, to provide avenues of mobility for students and staff and to create and work with international consortia of teacher education institutions. Developments in Europe led to the separation of university education from in-service education for teachers. Here the University College provided a number of international programmes in Northern Ireland and the Netherlands for school teachers to consider critically the teaching of underachieving young people. Further programmes analysed the management of violent pupils in the secondary school, the European dimension and working with children with special needs. Throughout, the University College continually encouraged its student body and members of academic staff to engage with outward mobility throughout Europe. In parallel to Erasmus, the University College developed a programme of international mobility embracing four continents. The University College has a history of success in grant applications and in the prompt delivery of its final reports.

A perspective within internationalisation includes student mobility, staff mobility, international recruitment of both students and staff and the development of cooperation in areas of mutual concern, such as research, consultancy and professional development activity, with partner institutions. In such a way the University College has and will continue to develop an international perspective underpinned by the paradigm of globalisation designed to enrich student experience.

International Strategic Objectives

Stranmillis University College aims to:

- a) deliver the University College's student mobility programmes such as Erasmus and International Mobility.
- b) organise the induction, orientation and ongoing care of international graduating and non-graduating students.
- c) assist academic departments to develop and maintain international institutional partnerships and engage in staff mobility programmes.
- d) support academic departments' internationalisation activities and deliver a coherent approach to these initiatives.
- e) facilitate student recruitment in international markets.
- f) encourage the development of international research consortia in the University College.
- g) encourage the development of staff consultancy work and involvement in professional development activity with international partners.
- h) facilitate a specialised visa and immigration service for international students and academics working abroad.

Operation

The University College will continue to work within Erasmus and Comenius to facilitate a broad and international approach to teacher education, Early Childhood Education and Health and Leisure Studies. The present strategy of the University College, facilitating partnership through the provision of a welcoming and warm environment at Stranmillis, will continue to underpin the international programme. The University College will strive to balance the number of outgoing students with those who choose to study at Stranmillis. It will endeavour to become a warm and welcoming environment for international students, to ensure that their experience of Northern Ireland is both formative and satisfying. In parallel to Erasmus, the University College will consider opportunities within the three chapters of Comenius, to broaden its in-service education, curriculum development and teacher training.

Alongside this approach, staff mobility will become integral to the international programme which will broaden both its appeal to staff as well as creating an imperative for the introduction of an international perspective within all programmes taught at the University College. Opportunities will be sought to work overseas in both developing and developed countries. Such opportunities presently exist in Malaysia, Uganda, Mozambique, Tanzania, Lesotho, People's Republic of China and the USA. As the University College broadens the scope of its student and staff experience, the recruitment of international students becomes an imperative for further investigation.

In summary, the international programme at Stranmillis University College is built upon five "building blocks" – student mobility, staff mobility, international recruitment, research and staff consultancy/professional development work.

Student Mobility

Student mobility will remain at the centre of the international programme. It provides a touchstone to gauge how successfully an international paradigm has been integrated into the work of the University College. In order to facilitate strong mobility rates, partnerships need to be regularly reassessed and refreshed. Partner institutions should be visited on a regular basis and their contribution evaluated in the broad scope of the total programme.

Staff Mobility

Staff mobility remains central to the international programme. It is a good gauge of the interest of the academic staff in globalisation and international approaches. Incoming staff mobility should become central to the development of the University College and the experience and perspectives of visitors regularly shared with academic staff who, in their turn, should avail of the opportunities the University College provides to broaden, ventilate and resource internal programmes.

International Student Recruitment

The recruitment of international students is the one area in this domain that the University College has not yet seriously addressed. It is seen in the university sector as crucial for the sustainable development of individual institutions and central to their prosperity. In a market decline as experienced in teacher education in Northern Ireland, the recruitment of international students should provide a counterbalance to prevailing market forces. Regrettably teacher education worldwide is “localised” and referenced to local jurisdictions. Thus to facilitate international recruitment, international programmes need to be developed to meet broader needs. This means that full-time undergraduate students are not an integral part of international recruitment. Therefore graduate students become the target. In the University College the MTeach, MA(ECS) and PGCE are areas for international development.

In order to recruit international students, sound support mechanisms for students need to be put in place. The wider environment of the university itself can provide the level of support necessary for international students, in housing, fellowship, support, counselling, language development and recreation. Academic staff need education to address the issues of teaching students whose culture is different from that of the everyday participant. However, given the benefits in kind of recruiting international students, this should become an imperative, launched as a case study in the relevant taught postgraduate areas. It is felt that agencies could provide the sort of support necessary to recruit international students. The other issues are those that should be considered by the University College as a whole.

Research Consortia

International education provides the ideal opportunity to create and sustain research consortia. The Comenius programme lends itself both to the formation of, and participation in, development consortia. The University College has been successful in both these spheres which have led, in turn, to a series of publications. These include underachievement, deprivation and disaffection, violent pupils, learning through narrative and teacher education. Without the support of international colleagues, research would have been much poorer in the University College. It is through the identification of specific research interests that the University College can progress its research agenda which is not of itself a matter of international education but facilitated by the same. Academic staff should be encouraged through appraisal to identify, seek membership of and participate in research consortia.

Staff Consultancy and Professional Development

As for the growth of research consortia, international education provides an excellent forum for the development of professional consultancy work with partner institutions. To date the University College has undertaken consultancy work in Malaysia, within the area of teacher professional development, and in Uganda, in relation to assessment processes in initial and postgraduate teacher education. Given the wide range of expertise amongst University College staff, participation in consultancy, particularly in relation to initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD), should be encouraged and developed.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this International Development Strategy, founded on the “building blocks” of student mobility, staff mobility, international recruitment, research and staff consultancy/professional development, offers an innovative and truly global contribution toward helping Stranmillis University College achieve its vision and overall strategic objective of building world-class provision for students and staff and creating a world-class learning community.