



Higher education

Internationalisation of universities: the «2015 University Strategy»

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When talking of internationalisation of the Spanish university system, we need to refer to the process started in 1999, when the ministers in charge of higher education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration. This introduced the so-called Bologna Process aimed at articulating higher education within an overall project to create a European Higher Education Area.



The ten-year period set to implement the agreements reached in the **Bologna Process** finished in 2010. This anniversary was celebrated under the Spanish **EU** presidency at an extraordinary minister conference held in Budapest and Vienna on 11 and 12 March. The balance of this decade of project building was described in the **Budapest-Vienna declaration on the European Higher Education Area**, approved at the Hofburg Congress Centre-Festsaal in Vienna on 12 March.

This project has gone beyond Europe, raising the interest of university systems of other countries. Internationalisation of the Bologna Process, which started formally at the **minister conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009)** with the creation of the **Bologna Policy Forum**, demonstrates the great interest this project raised in different countries like the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand as well as in Africa.

This shall be related with the international character of the **Spanish university system (SUS)**, considering historical academic ties between Spanish and Latin American universities. Countries like Mexico, Argentina and Brazil have shown their interest in the Bologna Process, acknowledging the role the SUS can play in developing an Ibero-American Higher Education Area and as transatlantic bridge in developing a knowledge-based society. The aim of setting the future base of this new global area guided the **2nd International Meeting of Universities** (especially from Latin America) recently held in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Legal framework regarding internationalisation of universities

Spanish universities initiated a strong modernisation process, especially within their functions but also their internal management. Some change is also structural in order to adapt

universities to the big social and economic challenges and to increase their presence and visibility at international or global level.

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The key reference to bring about this change is the **Modified Organic Law of the Organic University Law (LOMLOU)**, which led to further wide legislation after its implementation in 2007. The law determines the SUS commitment to fully embrace the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This decision regarding academic teaching, which ultimately brings us to an internationalisation process besides deeper European integration, is completed with the will of entering the **European Research Area (ERA)** project as well. The piece of reference in integrating universities into this project is found in the **Bill on science, technology and innovation** brought in by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

Excellence and internationalisation: two challenges to modernise Spanish universities

In order to adapt the modernisation process of Spanish universities to the **European Modernisation Agenda for Universities (2006)**, the Spanish government started an own strategic planning process with the name **2015 University Strategy (EU2015)**. This open and participatory process aimed at improving and modernising universities is based on quality, excellence in teaching, research and knowledge transfer, fostering talent as well as

excellence of university campuses and relations with the environment (university-city-area) as its main parameters. Apart from the teaching and research mission that characterises European universities (Humboldtian university), the values of a third mission related with responsibility, knowledge and technology transfer and promoting university social responsibility (post-Humboldtian university) are fostered.

The 2015 University Strategy is divided into four strategic areas: university mission, people, strengthening capacities of university institutions and the role of the environment. In each of these areas we find different strategic lines with according actions. One of the most important lines to modernise universities in the beginning of the 21st century is doubtless internationalisation.

Internationalisation of Spanish universities individually and of the different regional university systems within the SUS are today key strategic goals to develop and improve the country's competitiveness. The position of the SUS within the global world will depend on the degree of improvement in internationalisation it will be able to achieve by 2015, among others. However, there will be no internationalisation of universities without any prior considerable improvement in looking for excellence based on quality in all university functions. We can also say that this strategic goal will need to be considered transversal, embracing the higher education model (EHEA), the academic offer abroad and the way of defining the university professor of the future as well as improving preparation and competencies of the administrative and service staff.

The degree of internationalisation of Spanish universities is to be related with mobility of students, the success of the international and inter-university master offer and attraction of talent through the offer in PhD studies. In addition, internationalisation of universities is also affected by the degree of excellence in R&D of university research groups. Modernisation

of universities can thus not be understood unless action is undertaken for ultimate internationalisation of universities and the campuses they generate.

Why internationalising universities?

The **International Association of Universities** (IAU) published a guide for its members in 2003 that provided the key items for internationalisation of universities. Among the different reasons given are the following:

- ▶ The most important goal in internationalisation of universities is mobility of students and teachers, seizing international students for official degrees (bachelor and master) and attracting talent with PhD studies in excellence.

The most important goal in internationalisation of universities is mobility of students and teachers.

- ▶ Good internationalisation provides open and universal academic development, ensures quality of teaching according to European standards and secures international scientific cooperation.
- ▶ Attracting talent involves a high risk for the countries of origin if it does not return (brain drain).
- ▶ Specific funding related with the goals of the internationalisation policy is indispensable.
- ▶ Introducing advanced information and communication technologies and increasing the part-distance and distance learning offer.
- ▶ The quality of additional services shall provide a distinctive factor within equal teaching and research quality.

- ▶ Strategic internationalisation plans shall be extended to universities, regional university systems and ministries of education.¹
- ▶ Cooperation for development has to be promoted.
- ▶ Universities need to take a position in the international context through cross-border or interregional cooperation.

Turner & Robson published a very interesting book recently,² *Internationalizing the University*, where they explain the characteristics defining a university as being international through a multidimensional view of internationalisation of universities and show the main challenges. The book also provides several skills and abilities students involved in internationalisation processes can acquire based on best practices like those at the [University of Newcastle](#).

The effect of globalisation in university higher education³

In the field of universities, «internationalisation» refers to both internal change within the institution, especially regarding its vision, and integrating the international size into goals related with teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international cooperation.

Also, economic globalisation and the effects it has had on the labour market has led to the need of recognising curricula of degree holders from any place on the globe. Individual recognition through bilateral agreements as it has been commonly handled so far has limitations regarding swiftness and reliability.⁴ Such recognition will be easier particularly within the European Higher Education Area as demanded by the Bologna Declaration.

With the globalisation process in higher education, universities have been developed with

goals approaching them to the global level without leaving aside local or supranational action. These global universities, also called world-class universities, developed reference models facilitating comparison between university-level education institutions located in different continents. One of the best known models having a big influence on national systems is probably international comparative university evaluation. The first appeared in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (THE) in 2004 under the reference *World University Rankings*. The *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (ARWU) came up in China later, being the first academic evaluation of the world's best 500 universities following an initiative of the Shanghai Higher Education Institute from the Jiao Tong University.

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The number of global universities within a national system depends on the size of that system related to the rest of comparable systems. However, one main problem is found in defining the concept of university or higher education institution. The [European University Association](#) (EUA) had some important discussion on the different ways of defining a university. This is why the Spanish system is composed of 82 higher education institutions according to the International Association of Universities (www.unesco.org/iau), of which fifty are public and 27 private universities. In the same list we will surprisingly find that France has 450 higher education institutions, of which 95 are considered universities. Germany, with 327 institutions, has an average 6605 students per institution, which is comparable to France with 4515. As can be inferred from these data, the Spanish system features 22,351 students per university, a figure above the European average.

Progress of international evaluation of Spanish universities has been intensively followed by media in recent years, with the repeated say: «We have no (global) universities among the world top hundred». This sentence seems to intend to state the bad international – or rather global – role of Spanish universities.

Taking a closer look, we will see that according to the Top 200 World Universities in *Times Higher Education* (THE), the first Spanish university ranked is the **University of Barcelona**, in the 171st position in 2009. One year earlier it had been 186th, and 194th in 2007. Similarly, looking into the ARWU global university evaluation and classification system, we will observe that eleven Spanish institutions are among the world's top 500 and four among the top 300. The **Universidad Autónoma de Madrid**, the **Universidad Complutense de Madrid** and the **University of Valencia** are ranked 201-301, while the University of Barcelona lies in the world 152-200 and European 59-79 range.⁵ Yet we could go further into detail as evaluations are also published by knowledge fields. This singles out the most global universities in specific recognition (ARWU-Fields). There we find three Spanish universities among the world's best hundred in the field of chemistry: the **University of Zaragoza** (rank 51-75), the University of Barcelona (76-100) and the University of the Basque Country (76-100). We also find the University of Valencia among the hundred best in physics, the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in mathematics, the **Universitat Pompeu Fabra** in computing and the University of Barcelona in pharmaceutical clinics. This picture provides a better perception of the way gone by Spanish universities towards international recognition.

Europe reacted late in the view of the effect of these university rankings. Only some British and Nordic universities took leading positions in this list. Most European countries, especially from the South, thus including Spain, looked for ways of neutralising this unexpected global competition beyond strong and imbalanced competition with the United States in research and development, and very especially in attracting talent.



▲ The University of Barcelona leads Catalan and Spanish universities in international rankings.

In the United Kingdom, the initial stage in which the new **University of Manchester** was created⁶ led recently to the **New University Challenge** programme spearheaded by the **Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)** by which twenty new centres are to be created in global Knowledge Campus Cities by 2014 with generous funding from the Strategic Development Fund.

Some policies were aimed at merging universities that were adding to each other in order to reach a higher critical mass, international competitiveness and eventually global recognition by placing the new higher education institution higher in the ranking. France developed the **Pôles de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur (PRES-2006)** initiative in 2006, which produced the PRES Map in 2008 aiming at international recognition of its universities. A better investment for these projects with international scope resulted from the **Operation**

Campus, a project initiated in 2008 to aggregate and/or merge higher education institutions (Lyon Cité Campus, Université de Strasbourg, Université de Toulouse). These projects have been recently backed by the Grand Emprunt National programme and the new excellence campuses. In Germany there is a similar case with the **Excellence Initiative (2006-2012)** promoted by the **German Research Foundation (DFG)** and the **German Council of Sciences and Humanities (DFG)**. Within its 2015 University Strategy, Spain tries to facilitate global positioning of its universities through strategic aggregation of universities with other stakeholders through the **International Excellence Campus (CEI)** initiated in 2009. The goal of the CEI programme is to promote overall more competitive university campuses to reach international top reputation and reference and assist the whole Spanish university system in improving the quality of its offer, giving priority to its strengths and promoting differentiation of the university system.

Seizing international students has become a priority of internationalisation policies at universities.

In parallel to all this, globalisation or internationalisation of university higher education may create some imbalance and increase the lack of equity. How should it then be considered that somebody is left without access to international mobility due to lack of financial resources and efficient aid policies for such mobility? In the present time, in which an analysis to improve the social university model has been developed, inefficiency of general aid has been made clear. An excellent way of dealing with this subject has been recently laid down by Federico Mayor Zaragoza in the article «Tendencias políticas y sociales de la globalización: los retos para la Educación Superior» from the chapter *El contexto de la Educación Superior* within the 2009 Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) reports.⁷

Starting point of internationalisation of Spanish universities

One of the first observations to be made about the situation of internationalisation of universities in the 1995-2005 period is the reduction of internationalisation to what we know as international relations and short-term mobility within the **ERASMUS programme**. Furthermore, institutional internationalisation through research used to be left in the hands of researchers and research groups without any planned, true international policy. More recently, all universities as well as the **Rector Conference of Spanish Universities (CRUE)** have been developing new internationalisation policies within the modernisation strategy. An example of improvement can be found in the combination between cooperation and competence based on the action of the CRUE division specialising in this function, the **Spanish University Commission of International Relations (CEURI)**.

Seizing international students has become a priority of internationalisation policies at universities.⁸ Spanish university higher education has now opened to the international teaching offer and competes for more than 2.9 million students studying outside their country of origin.⁹ The increasing trend towards internationalisation through the demand of international university degrees is seen in that foreign students within the C34 countries grew from 4.9% in 2002 to 5.9% in 2005, a 34% increase.

In the first and second cycle and the new degrees implemented in the 2009-2010 academic year, 1,362,172 students have registered, 89% of which at public universities. The number of graduates was 187,986 according to the 2008-2009 forecast, of which 86.5% at public universities. In the same year, the number of foreign students at Spanish universities was 65,581, compared to 56,630 in the previous year, which means a 13.7% increase. The overall rate of foreign

students in the Spanish university system is 4.4%, much less than in France (19%), Germany (20%) and the United Kingdom (24%).

As to foreign students in Spain, they are 2.7% of the total in the first and second cycle, 3.6% have registered for a bachelor degree, 22.9% for an official master degree, 22% for a PhD degree and the rest are on a short-term stay. More specifically, it is surprising that out of 11,392 foreign students doing an official master degree, only 2383 come from the EU.

The fact that the same occurs in doctorate degrees shall make us alert about the lack of competitiveness in Europe. Good interaction between the traditional Spanish offer and demand for post-graduate studies by Latin American students has probably delayed competitiveness of Spain's offer in Europe as a result of the little number of courses taught in English or other European languages. Thus, of all foreign students coming to Spain, 48% are from Latin America and the Caribbean, 29.6% from the EU-27 and 5.9% from the rest of Europe. Northern Africa with 8.3% and Asia Pacific with 4.6% complete the list of most important areas of origin.

Catalonia is at the front of all Spanish regions, with 7.3% of foreign students, followed by the Madrid Region with 5.8%. Navarre, Valencia and the Balearic Islands have a competitiveness attraction rate of 4.6%.

The ERASMUS programme

Reform introduced by European signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration (1999) intended to increase the attraction of the European university offer for students from non-European countries, among others.¹⁰ Besides, the goal of improving university education of our European graduates should be met by means of a short stay at an EHEA (European Higher Education Area – ERASMUS Programme) signatory university. This programme was created in 1987 and lies at the origin of the

Bologna Declaration. Between 1990 and 2007, its scope grew from twelve participating countries and 30,000 beneficiary students to 150,000 students. This shows that the programme mobilised a total 1.7 million students within twenty years and is thus to be considered an excellent example of best international practice.

The programme has been very popular among Spanish students, as mobility grew from 19,988 in 2003-2004 to 25,900 in 2008-2009. These figures are significant if we consider that in 1993-1994 there were only 7000 students involved, that figure doubling within four years.

The ERASMUS Mundus programme

This programme shall be considered an objective of the **European Commission** to promote excellence and internationalisation of universities and the higher education system at master and PhD level. It was started on 5 December 2003 through the **decision 2317/2003/EC** of the European Parliament and the European Council.¹¹ Action in the second phase focuses on creating joint international programmes and international networks related with mobility, mobility grants and fostering international projects to promote European higher education. The first phase led to 103 selected master courses, 663 involved universities from Europe and third countries, 6181 mobility grants for students and 1121 subsidies for teachers plus 54 selected projects.

In Spain there have been 103 master programmes involving 26 universities.¹² 916 grants have been given to students from third countries at Spanish master programmes and 24 projects to promote European university education have been funded. Fostering action related with the **Erasmus Mundus** programme in the area of excellence master and PhD degrees, widening participation of Spanish universities and creating new consortia with Spanish participation, improving handling in issuing titles and elimination of bureaucratic barriers (visa etc.) are future challenges.

The Universidad.es Foundation

In order to improve the degree of internationalisation of the Spanish university system, the creation of the Fundación para la Proyección Internacional de las Universidades Españolas (**Universidad.es Foundation**) was created in October 2008 upon the initiative of the CRUE and the Secretariat of the Consejo de Coordinación Universitaria, starting its activity after the meeting of its board on 23 December 2008. It is a joint initiative by the **Spanish ministries of Education** and **Foreign Affairs and Cooperation**. Its goals include encouraging knowledge of the academic offer in the SUS for potential international bachelor, master and PhD students.

Further, an increase of the currently low international student rate at Spanish universities¹³ and placing the Spanish higher education system as a major destination for international students and researchers is sought. Support to universities in developing internationalisation strategies and initiatives regarding university cooperation for development will be promoted. An effort will be made to allow Spanish students to study abroad. Like other organisations with similar goals such as the **Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD)** from Germany, French **Campusfrance** and the **IIE-European Office** in the US, the Universidad.es Foundation will also provide support to initiatives of Spanish universities abroad and cooperate with other initiatives originated in regional university systems.

A final thought

The ideas explained above have shown that one of the biggest challenges of the SUS in modernising Spanish universities (2015 University Strategy – EU2015) is wide and necessary internationalisation of university missions (teaching, research, knowledge transfer and cooperation for development). The university internationalisation strategy, a main driver of which is EU2015, is today the best answer to accelerate the degree of visibility of the SUS in a global world with 3.2 million potential international students, which is expected to increase to seven million by 2025. However, there are still many barriers to surmount in the current university culture if progress towards full internationalisation is to be achieved, as is the lack of a sufficient number of expert teachers in international competencies, poor offer in subjects taught in English, too few landmark official international and inter-university master degrees, not enough quality services able to lure international talent, excessive red tape in residence and studying permits, portability of grants at European level and insufficient push for excellence offer at universities. Nevertheless, there is increasing progress in changing and modernising universities from inside as well as in the different regional university systems. Also, public authorities increasingly value and foster international mobility in equity, international R&D cooperation, talent attraction, excellence teaching offer and new programmes like the International Excellence Campus, allowing a better visibility and global recognition of the best Spanish universities.

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He has also been first vice-president of the Rector Conference of Spanish Universities, president of the International Advisory Council of the Ibero-American University Network of Business Incubators and president of the Strategic Commission of the Barcelona Metropolitan Strategic Plan.

An ordinary member of the Royal Academy of Pharmacy of Catalonia, he obtained the Narcís Monturiol medal for scientific merit from the Government of Catalonia.



Notes

1. In this respect, there are internationalisation projects by Catalan universities promoted by the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP) following the goals of the *Llibre Blanc de la Universitat de Catalunya* (2008), explained in the 2009 document of the International Dissemination Plan of Catalan Public Universities 2010-2015 and the project of the Finnish Ministry of Education, Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015.

2. TURNER, Y.; ROBSON, S. (2008). *Internationalizing the University*. Continuum Studies in Education. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

3. To review the effect of globalisation in higher education, cf. ALTBACH, Ph.G. (2006). *Globalization and the University. Realities in an Unequal World*, in: FOREST, J.J.; ALTBACH, Ph.G. (eds.). *International Handbook of Higher Education*. Dordrecht: Springer, p. 121-139. BEERKENS, E. (2003). «Globalisation and Higher Education Research». *Journal of Studies in International Education*, vol. 7(2). For a wide discussion on globalisation in higher education, cf. IGLESIAS DE USSEL, J.; DE MIGUEL, J.M.; TRINIDAD, A. (2009). *Sistemas y políticas de educación superior*. Madrid: Consejo Económico y Social. «Estudios», 215.

4. STEPHEN HUNT, E.; BERGAN, S. (ed.) (2009). *Developing Attitudes to Recognition: Substantial Differences in an Age of Globalisation*. «Council of Europe Higher Education», 13. Council of Europe.

5. One of the most elitist associations of European research-intensive universities, The League of European Research Universities (LERU), with only 22 member institutions, admitted the University of Barcelona recently.

6. A look at the Strategic Plan of this university updated in 2010 is recommended, especially its internationalisation side: Advancing The Manchester 2015 Agenda. The Strategic Plan of The University of Manchester.

7. *La Educación Superior en tiempos de cambio. Nuevas dinámicas para la responsabilidad social*. Madrid: Global University Network for Innovation, 2009, p. 24-27.

8. For an excellent review on the US, cf. BRAWNER BEVIS, T.; LUCAS, Ch.J. (2007). «International Students in American Colleges and Universities», a *History*. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.

9. Taking the 34 member countries of the C34 group analysed in the 2009 Intercultural Dialogue on Campus, out of 21 million students registered in C34 (2005), 1.25 million were external, which makes 5.9%. Within this group, 42% amounted to inter-European mobility, 16% came from Africa, 29% from Asia, 5% from Latin America and 3% from North America. Cf. BERGAN, S.; RESTOUËIX, J.-Ph. (2009). *Intercultural dialogue on Campus*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

10. RIVZA, B.; TEICHLER, U. (2007). «The Changing Role of Student Mobility». *Higher Education Policy*, 20, p. 457-475. «Student and Staff Mobility», in: *The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe. Key Indicators on the Social Dimension and Mobility*. EUROSTAT-Eurostudent.eu, 2009, p. 97-111.

11. The first phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme (2004-2008) took place with five annual calls and four actions, with a €230m budget, while the budget for the second phase is four times bigger.

12. Of all universities participating in master degrees, 13 come from the Andalusian university system, 22 from Catalonia and 12 from Madrid. A total 916 students from third countries are studying at Spanish universities. Eleven Spanish universities acted as coordinators and ninety as programme partners in 2007-2009.

13. The number of international students (staying at least one year) in Spain in 2007-2008 was 55,309 (37% from Latin America, 28% from the EU). This figure increased to 65,581 in 2008-2009. Strong and continuous growth is thus observed since 2000-2001, when there were 21,110 students.