



Internationalisation of Curricula – Handbook

of the University of Graz

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Internationalisation of curricula at the University of Graz

The University of Graz sees itself as an educational and research institution with multiple international connections. In teaching and study programmes, promoting mobility as well as training the professional, social and personal skills of students is a central concern which is reflected in the mission statement of the university. This also includes developing cross-cultural skills as well as foreign language skills in order to be able to meet the demands of the study programme and the profession. Likewise, early involvement of students with international aspects can help promote junior researchers, who will be increasingly active in a global context. If, in the future, top-level research is to be successfully implemented in international teams, international perspectives and the development of intercultural communication skills are needed from the very beginning of the students' university education.

In general, internationalisation can be seen as a comprehensive process in tertiary education and training: "The process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education." (Knight 2004, 11; quoted from Beelen/Jones 2015, 60) For the authors Whitsed and Green (2013), such a broad concept of internationalisation also means an internationalisation of curricula (see Beelen/Jones 2015, 60). Even though some authors have pointed out the importance of an informal curriculum (support services, additional offers by the university, etc.), this handbook focuses on curricular dimensions.

The curricula of the University of Graz already include many recommendations for a study abroad period. In addition, a number of joint degree studies have been set up that call for a mandatory study abroad period. The intention in all these activities is that students gain international experience, acquire cross-cultural skills and look beyond the boundaries of their own institute and their own study programme. It also allows them to build up international networks that ideally will lead to international cooperation in the future.

This handbook takes a look at the internationalisation of curricula. How can we specifically promote student mobility through curricular frameworks and how can we avoid obstacles to mobility? In addition, the handbook points out ways to implement a global window in the curricula in order to integrate aspects of internationalisation more strongly and make them more visible. In this regard the *global window* goes beyond simply promoting student mobility and advocates "internationalisation at home" as a more comprehensive internationalisation strategy for all students. In the course of the discussion, the differentiation between mobility windows and global windows will be addressed in more detail. This handbook on the *Internationalisation of curricula* shows a catalogue of measures as well as variations and possibilities for anchoring mobility and global windows in curricula. It is intended as a basis for discussion for decision-makers at the University of Graz and is thus a milestone on the way to internationality in study programmes and teaching.

1. Mobility windows | Promoting mobility in curriculum development

Promoting mobility in the study programme and teaching is one aspect of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy. There is also a declared desire from a political point of view to increase student mobility. "Increasing student mobility numbers is an explicit objective in European policy as well as in many national and institutional policies." (Ferencz 2013, 51). According to the Leuven Communiqué (2009), 20 per cent of graduates should have completed a study-related study period or internship abroad. The Higher Education Mobility Strategy of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) (2016, 10) states that, "by 2025, 30% to 35% of annual university graduates should have completed a study-related stay abroad". The strategy focuses mainly on the development of so-called credit mobility¹, e.g. within the framework of the ERASMUS+ programme.

The potential target group for a study abroad period was identified in the Student Social Survey 2015. According to this study, 30 to 35 per cent of students are potentially interested in studying abroad. (see Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna 2016)

From a curricular perspective, mobility also presents itself as an opportunity to supplement one's own offerings or to expand one's specialisation. By recognising study achievements acquired abroad the university can integrate learning outcomes that would not have been available through the core curriculum alone. This makes study programmes more flexible and students benefit from further options and interest-based studies.

1.1 Recognition of academic achievements performed abroad

According to Section 58(9) of the Universities Act (UG), it should be possible to study abroad in bachelor's and master's programmes without losing time. In principle, the Universities Act provides for recognition when there is equivalence. Recommendations for recognising qualifications and achievements acquired abroad can also be found in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which advocates more generous recognition wherever there are no substantial differences. It states that qualifications and achievements acquired abroad should be recognised if there are no substantial differences. According to the Lisbon Recognition Convention: "Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile, workload, quality and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way [...] Recognition of course achievements does not require a one-to-one congruency." (Lisbon Recognition Convention)

Indicators to check whether there are substantial differences are in particular:

- the **level** (assignment to a bachelor's or master's programme) at which the learning outcome is based and
- the **amount** (workload) required to achieve the intended learning outcome. ECTS credit points are always only estimates of how long it takes average students to achieve a learning outcome.
- The focus is on the acquired **learning outcomes** and not the individual contents of a module.
- Differences can be accepted as long as the **success of the study** is not endangered due to a lack of essential learning outcomes.

¹ Credit mobility refers to the mobility of an exchange student who spends a limited period of time at a host institution during which he/she undertakes activities for which credits are earned and recognised by the home university. This is different from degree mobility, where students take advantage of student mobility (even if only in part) to obtain a degree. (see ECTS Guide 2015,73) A trend towards degree mobility can be observed, while credit mobility overall seems to be declining (cf. Nickel 2011, 12).

1.2 Mobility windows

A mobility window embedded in the curriculum should contribute to the unobstructed processing of mobility and its recognition. How can a mobility window be defined? Ferencz and others (2013) have provided a clear and differentiated definition:

Mobility Window | Definition

“A mobility window is a period of time reserved for international student mobility that is embedded into the curriculum of a study program.” (Ferencz et al. 2013, 12)

A characteristic feature of the mobility window is the fact that it is an explicit part of the curriculum and that the possibilities for recognition are regulated in a transparent manner. This explicitly refers to physical mobility across national borders. (See Ferencz et al. 2013, 12 et seq.) In addition, mobility windows can be part of a more comprehensive global window, which also includes the concept of internationalisation at home. Ferencz and others (2013, 17) cite the following characteristics for differentiating mobility windows:

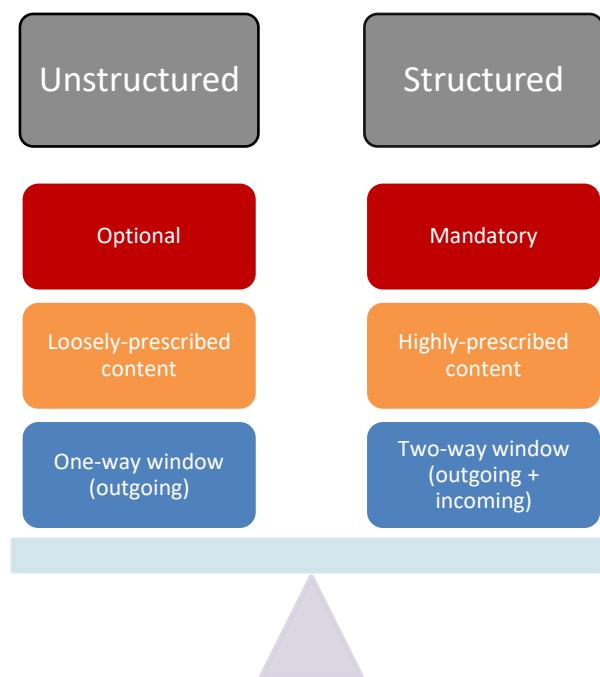


Figure 1: Types of mobility windows

Students usually begin studying abroad at a later stage of their studies and use this time to specialise in a particular subject (see Ferencz et al. 2013, 17).

Various studies investigating obstacles to student mobility identify fear of losing time during studies as a relevant mobility barrier. Students increasingly cite curricular aspects as obstacles to mobility, e.g. “time lost for study programme in Austria [...] 37%” and “recognition of study achievements abroad (26%)” (Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWF) 2016, 14).

In order to avoid study time delays and difficulties in the recognition of examinations, targeted curricular measures can be taken.

Curricular measures

Duration and scope:

- a) Extent of mobility: at least 3 months or 15 ECTS credit points (see BMWFW 2016) or shorter study abroad periods (practice, language courses) of 14 days or more.
It is considered desirable to enable a study abroad period of 30 ECTS credit points.
- b) In bachelor's programmes, mobility activities in the form of studies abroad should not be recommended until at least the third semester so that students can do them, for example, within the framework of Erasmus+. An internship abroad can generally be recommended from the first semester onwards, although a higher semester is probably more appropriate for professional reasons when it comes to promoting employability.
In master's programmes, mobility can be recommended from the first semester onwards, but this is not necessarily advisable due to the organisational lead time of approximately one year.
- c) Joint study programmes: Joint Degree Programmes – also known as “tracks” within a curriculum – are a way of organising the study abroad period for students in a very structured way. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy's Higher Education Mobility Strategy (2016) also calls for an increase in joint, double and multiple degree programmes (23).

Practical experience:

- d) Internship for relevant work experience (mandatory internship): implementation of mandatory training abroad
The content of the mandatory internship must be examined to make sure it is relevant to the studies. Approval must be given in advance.
In the case of mandatory internship, it should be taken into account that while this mobility promotes students and is an appropriate measure to increase the employability of graduates, it can have a negative impact on social dimensions, such as the heterogeneity of the student body. It is possible that social selection takes place before the study programme begins. Factors such as the availability of study places and funding should be considered.
- e) Career-oriented internship (recommended internship): it should be promoted that it is also possible to complete the voluntary career-oriented internship abroad, within the framework of the free elective courses. A maximum of 8 weeks or 12 ECTS credit points can be earned during the study programme, according to the statutory provisions of the University of Graz. The respective extent is related to the scope of the free elective courses in the curriculum.
- f) In general, it can be seen that practical experience supports the entry into the professional world and that a moderate subject-related activity has a positive effect on the examination performance.

Semester recommendations and modularisation:

- g) Semester recommendation in the curriculum for optional mobility
Here, a designated semester, to which electives, elective modules or free elective courses are specifically assigned, can help to facilitate the recognition of academic achievements.
It can also be useful to mention modules that are particularly suitable for study abroad.
- h) Modules that cover two semesters should not extend into the semester recommended for the study abroad period.
- i) The curriculum may specify registration prerequisites for individual courses because of the content. Lean and coordinated chains of prerequisites help to ensure the smooth continuation of studies after returning from the host country.
- j) If possible, the goal, content, time frame and scope of the study abroad period should be defined in the curriculum. If learning outcomes are defined, reference may be made to them in the recognition process. Learning outcomes should not be defined in too much detail and should be competence-oriented.

General recommendations/activities:

- a) Organisation of courses: if possible, approve blocked courses (mobility students are often confronted with different academic calendars. Home-coming as well as incoming students can benefit from blocked courses.)
- b) Announce recommended courses for incoming students. Offering English language courses helps to overcome initial language barriers. Make experiences abroad the subject of discussion in an “intercultural classroom” in order to arouse interest in study abroad periods.
- c) Raise awareness of the possibility of Erasmus placement scholarships (available for internships abroad that are longer than 2 months).
- d) The University of Graz currently gives grants of up to €200 for travel expenses for completing an internship abroad. Applications may be submitted to the Office of International Relations.
- e) Depending on budgetary possibilities: offer summer schools together with partner institutions on international topics that can be counted for the study programme (ECTS credit points).

2. Curricular anchoring of global windows and internationalisation at home

A so-called global window is more general than a mobility window, because not all students can or want to spend time abroad during their studies. In order to still give these students the opportunity to come into contact with international topics, foreign languages etc., activities for the internationalisation of curricula should be anchored more strongly in their structure.

Global window | Definition and description

The global window is a general term that refers to a method of integrating the exploration of international aspects into a curriculum. The term summarises **mobility** for students and teachers/researchers as well as **internationalisation at home**. A global window is aimed at all students, and not just a certain segment.

The goals of integrating global windows in the curricula are to:

- ✓ Acquire cross-sectional skills such as intercultural, international skills
- ✓ Train social-communicative skills
- ✓ Raise awareness of a possible study abroad period and reduce obstacles to mobility
- ✓ Highlight topics in the modules that are of international/transnational/global relevance
- ✓ Build knowledge
- ✓ Establish and strengthen university and research cooperation projects
- ✓ Create spaces for reflection on mobility experiences

Internationalisation at home | Definition

“Internationalisation at Home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimension into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments.” (Beelen/Jones 2015, 69)

The authors Jos Beelen and Elspeth Jones (2015, 63 et seq.) emphasise that the offers of internationalisation at home should be directed to all students. They should therefore be implemented in the compulsory subjects of a curriculum so that students can train international and cross-cultural skills. They emphasise that above all content and learning outcomes need to be internationalised and note that it is not enough to simply offer an existing curriculum in a foreign language (see Beelen/Jones 2015, 64).

The acquisition of **cross-cultural skills** is intended in particular to prepare students for later activities abroad or for working in an international team. (see Bolten 2007, 115) “Cross-cultural skills do not represent a separate skill set, but rather [...] the ability to relate individual, social, professional and strategic sub-competences in their best possible combination to cross-cultural contexts of action.” (Bolten 2007, 112)

As a cross-sectional task, cross-cultural skills comprise many sub-skills, such as tolerance of ambiguity, awareness of dissent, empathy, foreign language skills, cultural knowledge, communication skills, role distance, etc. (see Bolten 2007, 112 et seq.)

In the context of internationalisation at home, it can be useful to pay particular attention to the successful integration of incoming students within teaching/learning settings in order to promote the acquisition of cross-cultural skills. A deliberate focus on international perspectives can stimulate the exchange between students and be valuable both professionally and meta-professionally. Such “international classrooms” can be quite a challenge from a didactic perspective, which is why continuing education in this area is recommended.

Within the framework of curriculum design, it is suggested that international and cross-cultural learning outcomes should also be made visible in the qualifications profile.

Curricular measures could be:

Modularisation:

- a) A global window should preferably be implemented as a separate compulsory module; alternatively, it can be an elective.
- b) Scope of each module should be approximately 15 ECTS credit points.
- c) The module should be designed in such a way that it can also be completed during a study abroad period.
- d) The qualifications profile of the curriculum and the module descriptions should emphasise the skills that are acquired by completing the module.

Content aspects:

- e) Include foreign languages, in particular English, as professional languages
- f) Highlight and group together topics in the modules that are of transnational/global relevance
- g) Provide information on the possibility of writing final theses in a language other than German.
- h) Within the framework of courses or a career-oriented internship as part of the free elective courses, buddy activities (mentoring activity/language tandems for incoming students), for example, can be counted for ECTS credit points. These courses can also serve to prepare, accompany and follow up the mentoring activity.
- i) Promote cross-cultural skills among students through appropriate forms of teaching and learning
- j) Depending on budgetary possibilities and following approval: offer summer schools and lecture series or clusters of courses with international/transnational/global topics

3. Contact points and advice at the University of Graz

Teaching and curriculum development:

Curricula Development and Study Services | Teaching Development

E-mail: lehrentwicklung@uni-graz.at

Tel.: 0316 380/1073 or 1074

<http://lehr-studienservices.uni-graz.at>

Mobility and internationalisation:

Office for International Relations

E-mail: international@uni-graz.at

Tel.: 0316 380/1249

<https://international.uni-graz.at/>

Teaching competence, higher education teaching guidance, continuing education:

Competence Centre for University Teaching

E-mail: zlk@uni-graz.at

Tel.: 0316 380/1210

<https://lehrkompetenz.uni-graz.at/>

4. Implementing the measures

All study programmes should integrate a global window when creating new curricula. For existing curricula, a set of measures for internationalisation should be selected by the Curricular Committee. If possible, a separate module should be defined to anchor a global window.

In the curriculum, mobility and/or internationalisation-at-home activities could be combined in a separate module for each. Students should be free to choose between the variants.

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Curricula Development and Study Services
Universitätsplatz 3, 8010 Graz
Tel.: +43 (0) 316 380-1056
Fax: +43 (0) 316 380-69-1056
E-mail: lehrservices@uni-graz.at
<http://lehr-studienservices.uni-graz.at/>