

International and intercultural competences for all Ghent University graduates: an introductory guide

Preface

*This document is meant to **support faculties in the general introduction of “International and intercultural competences” in all programmes**. There are several reasons to implement this concept. Current challenges in society make us first of all question whether contemporary curricula are acceptable without graduates achieving such international and intercultural competences. It is also a unique chance to anchor internationalisation in the curricula and to broaden internationalisation to all students and to include (almost) all staff members in internal internationalisation debates. It shifts the focus on internationalisation as an end in itself to internationalisation as a driver for educational quality and to its impact on students. Above this, the use of the concept of international and intercultural competences enhances transparency since it creates a kind of ‘common language’, beneficial e.g. in contacts with foreign colleagues, and offers opportunities for (international) cooperation and benchmarking. Finally the concept is also more and more used as a core element in different international frameworks focusing on the quality of internationalisation, e.g. the framework for the Distinctive Quality Feature of the NVAO and the frameworks for the Certificate on Quality in Internationalisation of the EQA.*

*This document is **meant to be used in a broader process** at the level of faculties and programmes. A process that should be a joint responsibility and endeavour of different stakeholders, including at least the FCI (Faculty Commission on Internationalisation) and FDO (Faculty Department of Educational Support). Such a broader process also includes various supporting measures meant to offer **inspiration** (e.g. by means of extra and concrete examples and best practices; a thematic internal UGent-seminar), **information** (providing existing data (results of queries) related to the programme’s internationalisation; links to existing practices, including at other institutions), **guidance** (offering faculties and programmes the possibility to be supported in developing a vision on internationalisation, implementing an internationalised curriculum and measuring the achievement) and **stimulation** (investigating the possibility to give incentives (financially or otherwise) to programmes; support programmes interested in labelling their internationalisation practices). In the implementation plan at the end of the document, this is further developed.*

Introduction

The third strategic goal of the Integrated Policy Plan for Internationalisation of Ghent University reads as follows:

Ghent University internationalises its education as much as possible by structurally embedding mobility of students and staff and internationalisation@home

The comprehensive internationalisation of a university's education starts with the inclusion of it in the goals of the different programmes' curricula. Hence an important starting point for this is the university's Competence Model. In 2005-06, the *UGent-competentiemodel* (Ghent University's competence model) was developed and introduced. This model is based on six competence fields and each field consists of a set of competences. In the illustrated version of the competence model, extra inspiration and input have been included to cater for the demands of the programmes.

In its meeting of 29 October 2014, the *Onderwijsraad* (Education Council) of Ghent University adopted the revised *UGent-competentiemodel* (Ghent University's competence model)¹. Inspired by the Integrated Policy Paper on Internationalisation, the revised model stresses in competence field 5: "societal competence". Both at the end of a bachelor's and master's degree, graduates need to have achieved what in this model as well as in international literature is referred to as "international/intercultural competences"². In the model it is represented in this way (p. 10):

<i>Competentiegebied 5: Maatschappelijke competentie</i> <i>Een academicus is zich bewust van de wisselwerking tussen de temporele en maatschappelijke context en wetenschap en integreert deze inzichten in eigen werk.</i>	
<i>5.4 Inzicht hebben in interculturele en internationale debatten</i>	<i>5.4 Cultuurgevoeligheid en respect voor diversiteit integreren in het wetenschappelijk werk.</i>

One of the starting points of the renewed competence model with regard to the implementation of these international/intercultural competences at the programme level is: "*De beoogde interculturele/internationale competenties kunnen in de ene opleiding van een andere aard [zijn] dan in de andere*" – the envisaged international/intercultural competences can be of a different nature in one programme as compared to another³. This means in practice that programmes need to define these international/intercultural competences and hence make clear what these are for a graduate of that specific bachelor or master.

Defining the envisaged international/intercultural competences, as referred to in the UGent Competence Model, is only one step in the process. It is advisable that before taking this step, programmes define a vision on internationalization to assure that all the programme stakeholders are starting from the same assumptions. Other important steps are assuring that all students in the programme (so not only these studying abroad) are offered sufficient opportunities to achieve the envisaged international/intercultural competences and defining assessment mechanisms to measure whether indeed the envisaged international/intercultural competences have been achieved. These issues are dealt with in this guide as

¹ See: <https://www.ugent.be/intranet/nl/onderwijs/kwaliteitszorg/competentie/model.htm> for more information.

² Alternatively the term "international/intercultural learning outcomes" is used when an explicit link to a qualifications framework is made, hence including level indicators in the description.

³ See "Uitgangspunten van de UGent competentiebenadering" (*Starting points of the UGent competence approach*), p.6.

well. Such an integrated approach guarantees that internationalisation can be used as a strong means to offer qualitative programmes, ensuring that graduates are internationally/interculturally competent.

Defining a vision on internationalisation

Before starting to define the envisaged international / intercultural competences, a programme (or a faculty if more appropriate) defines its vision on internationalisation; to make explicit what the added value of internationalisation is for the programme, especially with regard to what is expected from its graduates.

Such an exercise of course takes time, but there are clearly some advantages to it and it reduces the time investment in the following phases. A first advantage is that defining a vision requires the involvement of all relevant stakeholders (staff, students, graduates, working field,...) and this reduces potential resistance during the further implementation. Secondly, there is evidence that when students are made better aware of the 'bigger picture', the achievement of the envisaged competences is facilitated. Students even react negatively to internationalisation activities which cannot be linked to an overall strategy, based on the programme's vision. A clear illustration of this relates to teaching staff mobility⁴.

Defining a clear and shared vision is hence a first but necessary and beneficiary step to be able to collaborate in unison at a later stage. It is therefore advisable to write such a vision not only with representatives from a purely managerial level. Use this momentum to turn this vision-writing into a collective exercise to create unity between different stakeholders, including students, alumni and working field representatives, although high-level support for it remains crucial.

A survey among more than 500 graduates from Flemish higher education revealed that there is even a negative correlation between "teaching staff mobility" (a foreign teacher spending a week or so lecturing in the institution of the students involved in the study) that was not framed properly and the achievement of generic competences. When however this "guest appearance" does fit in into the regular curriculum, when there is proper preparation and follow-up, when students are well informed of the bigger picture they do report a positive impact on their competence achievement.

⁴ The example is derived from De Decker, F. (2004) "De impact van internationalisering op de Vlaamse hoger onderwijscurricula", a study commissioned by and delivered to the Flemish Ministry of Education.

Three steps implementation phase

The vision of the programme creates a firm basis for the implementation phase, which consists of three main steps:

1. Defining and describing the programme's international/intercultural competences
2. Creating enough learning experiences in the programme's curriculum to allow the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural competences
3. Measuring the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural competences

Hereafter it is described how these three steps can be put into practice in the Ghent University context.

Defining and describing the programme's international/intercultural competences

In the introduction, it was already mentioned that the revised UGent Competence model requires programmes to define and describe their international/intercultural competences. In the model these competences are part of competence field 5: Societal competence (*"an academic is aware of the cross fertilization between the temporary and societal context and science and integrates these insights in personal work"*). A distinction is made between the bachelor's and master's level:

- Bachelor: *"have insight in intercultural and international debates"*
- Master: *"integrate culture sensitivity and respect for diversity in scientific work"*

The competence model adds the following to this general description: *"the envisaged international/intercultural competences can be of a different nature in one programme as compared to another. Defining these concepts in a clear way and translating the competences from the UGent competence model specifically, is often related to learning pathways in the curriculum, a clear programme construction and/or evaluation criteria."*

It should be clear that this consignment is a collaborative one involving different stakeholders internally and externally. International standards and expectations from as well employers as society as a whole are to be taken into account. Of course it is logical that programmes do not start this exercise from scratch, but that they base this on the existing practices. One of the main ambitions should be to make explicit what has perhaps been implicitly present in the programme's contents and envisaged competences and/or is assumed to be present. In this way, possible misassumptions can be corrected or existing sub-surface practices can be made apparent. Above all, it gives programmes the chance to better and more clearly communicate its international ambitions to its students, staff, partner institutions and the outside world in general.

International/intercultural competences could be formulated in a very general way, limiting these to generic, transversal knowledge, skills and attitudes. All too much, one sees these being limited to *soft skills* such as linguistic skills, citizenship, global engagement, personal growth etc. A more powerful and appealing way of formulating these however is to really contextualise these competences and bring to the front what this could entail for the programme in a more specific way or even incorporate an international/intercultural dimension in the programme's core competences.

After all, being internationally/interculturally competent for sure means something different for a biologist, an engineer, a philosopher, a journalist, a psychologist, an audiologist...

It is equally important to stress that including these international/intercultural competences in the set of programme competences implies that, like all other competences, these have to be pursued by and evaluated for all students.

This means that not only the 25% or so graduates that will have spent a sufficient period abroad will have had the chance to achieve the envisaged international/intercultural competences. Also students going abroad for a short period or students staying “at home” should hence be offered enough possibilities to achieve these.

This means that a combination of offering students a variety of internationalisation experiences and including an international dimension in the curriculum has to be strived for. This challenge of creating enough international/intercultural learning experiences will be dealt with in the next paragraph.

Creating opportunities for international/intercultural learning experiences

As has been made clear, programmes will need to create a variety of opportunities to students to achieve the envisaged international/intercultural learning outcomes, combining a variety of internationalisation experiences and developing an international dimension in the curriculum. Again here, many programmes have already worked hard on developing various mobility opportunities; offer international, English-taught courses to their students; have developed over the years a variety of Internationalisation@home initiatives or use ample reference to international or intercultural contexts. But this does not necessarily mean that these initiatives are part of clear strategy. It is very well possible that some students following the same programme get abundant possibilities to become internationally/interculturally competent (because of personal choice) but that others don't because they either choose not to do so, are not stimulated or are not offered the possibility. This means that some of the proposed possibilities will exist in a programme and others won't. But programmes are encouraged to reflect on all and strategically decide on what to offer when to whom, keeping in mind that the overall aim is to eventually reach out to all students.

- Internationalisation experiences: creating opportunities for all students

With the overall UGent-aim to reach by 2020 at least 25% of all graduates having achieved 15 ECTS-credits abroad, there is a clear quantitative target related to internationalisation experiences. Programmes have hence to define or develop a strategy on how such internationalisation experiences could best be integrated in the curriculum and hence how student mobility could best be facilitated. In international literature, more and more the concept of “Mobility windows”⁵⁵ is put forward as a key to success and a lot of preparatory work has been done at Ghent University to facilitate programmes to include this into the curriculum.

In line with the abovementioned endeavour to reach out to all students, not only the mobile ones, this concept could be renamed “**Windows of opportunity**” and defined as follows:

A specific period built in in a study programme in which specific room is offered for acquiring international/intercultural competences, preferably with a choice for students from a range of diverse, complementary learning routes to cater for the diversity in students' abilities, means and possibilities.

The cruxes to implement these windows include the inclusion of it in an overall (faculty/programme) (internationalisation) vision and strategy, embedding it in the regular curriculum reform processes and guarantee the validation of it as part of the regular curriculum (which means for students the following elements have to be

⁵⁵ See for example “Mapping “mobility windows” in European higher education. Examples from selected countries”, of which more information can be found on <http://www.aca-secretariat.be/?id=597>.

made clear: the envisaged competences, the amount of credits, assessment information, grading system etc.). In short: a regular “ECTS Course description” has to be developed for it.

Another important element in an overall approach to internationalisation experiences is related to the faculty's or programme's approach to “**Internationalisation@Home**”. To allow for faculties and programmes to establish their own course, in line with their overall policy, it was decided that from 2015 onwards all faculties will receive a budget to deploy a proper I@H-policy⁶.

A third group of possible internationalisation experiences includes all types of **short-term mobility initiatives**. Activities e.g. “Intensive programmes”, “Summer schools”, “Field trips” etc., that can either take place in Belgium or abroad should be created, enforced and above all be offered to both international and UGent-students. An important condition to be able to count these among internationalisation experiences offered in programmes is of course that also for these an “ECTS Course description” (including competences, credits, grading etc.) are developed and that students are given the guarantee that the credits will be validated as part of their regular curriculum.

A fourth group of possible internationalisation experiences to be addressed are **virtual mobility initiatives** (including video conferencing agreements with foreign partner institutions, the use of MOOCS, cross-cultural virtual group

For all these initiatives it is of utmost importance that these are framed and put in perspective, because [...] without preparation, exploitation and reflection, in a world without international or intercultural learning, these will not be meaningful, and therefore useless, just some nice memories and exotic selfies. (source: <http://www.eaie.org/blog/comprehensive-internationalisation-ehea/>)

assignments etc.). Again here it is important that regular quality assurance mechanisms are put in place to guarantee validation.

- **Internationalisation dimension: creating an international classroom**

A strong approach to reach out to broad groups of students and offering these learning opportunities to achieve international/intercultural competences, is embedding an international dimension in the programme's curriculum. An obvious way of putting this into practice is investigating whether current course contents already are or could be made more (explicitly) international/intercultural. More international/intercultural in this sense means that students are offered and confronted with different world views, concepts, insights etc. In this respect, such an approach is very much related to another new element in the UGent competence model, viz. competence 3.6. “multiperspectivism”: *to approach a problem from different perspectives*.

Two interesting possibilities to embed different perspectives into the curriculum constitute two alternative or complementary approaches to internationalising the curriculum: assuring a more diverse/international student body and attracting foreign teachers (either on a temporary basis or as part of the regular teaching staff).

⁶ We refer to the internal Ghent University document “A New Approach to Internationalisation@Home” for more background on this topic.

More diversification in the student body entails that regular students and incoming (exchange) students are not segregated from each other but purposefully mixed to facilitate a multiperspectivistic approach. This means that programmes should investigate the possibility to join efforts and to make sure that their “Mobility Window” becomes a real “Window of opportunity” when crossing it over with their existing “Exchange Programmes”, hence creating an interesting offer of English-taught “international courses” for both incoming exchange and regular UGent-students. Equally, including foreign (exchange) teaching staff can add such an international/intercultural dimension to the programme curriculum, at least when their contribution is not a “one shot” but part of an overall strategy (see above). The programme can define which courses are more appropriate to do so and even strategically involve staff to add different perspectives to the existing curriculum.

When these two approaches are put into practice on a larger scale, combined with an international content, an appropriate pedagogical approach and the right classroom management, one can talk about an international classroom. Much literature is available on this concept which can also be useful for programmes intending to

The U4-network of which Ghent University is a member, offers an “International Classroom Course” for coordinators of international programmes. More info can be found on <http://www.u4network.eu/index.php/network/projects/165-international-perspectives-in-teaching-and-learning>.

implement less far-reaching types of internationalisation dimensions.

Measuring the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural competences

This last step in the process is for sure not the easiest, but probably the most important one. Much neglected in the past, measuring whether an internationalisation experience of a student or the internationalisation dimension of the curriculum have an impact on students’ competences has gained growing attention over the last couple of years. In the past, it seems to have been taken for granted that studying abroad automatically leads to more international/intercultural competence. Not surprisingly, the assessment of international/intercultural competences is progressing simultaneously with the overall growing expertise and experience in competence assessment. Above all this has to be clear: assessment of international/intercultural competences is primarily competence assessment. It hence needs to follow assessment rules, standards, customs. Also Ghent University has these, including a set of 17 overall testing principles⁷ and many more tips and tricks related to assessment⁸.

⁷ These can be found in English at <http://www.onderwijstips.ugent.be/tips/17-ugent-testing-principles/>

⁸ See <http://onderwijstips.ugent.be>, including a number of suggestions on evaluation.

According to Darla Deardorff⁹ it is of prime importance that one first of all clearly describes what has to be assessed and that one defines it as accurately as possible. Hence the importance of a clear vision and accurate definition and description of the programme's international/intercultural competences as described above. Deardorff adds to this the general rule to align the assessment methods to the characteristics of the competences one wants to assess. There are hence some specificities to be anticipated with the assessment of international/intercultural competences. The major specific element is probably that proportionally there is a larger attitudinal component involved in such competences. This necessitates that in some cases a balanced mix of direct (e.g. group presentation) and indirect (e.g. portfolio) assessment methods will be the best option.

In the annex a proposal is introduced for programmes wanting to benchmark or even certify their internationalisation policy and practice. This Framework for the assessment of quality in internationalisation can offer further inspiration.

⁹ Deardorff, D.K. (2009) *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Conclusion

An integrated internationalisation policy also means that internationalisation has to be integrated in the heart of the education mission, policy and practice of Ghent University. Now that international / intercultural competence is an integral part of the Competence Model, programmes are explicitly triggered to define what this entails for their graduates, who will be working in a global and multicultural society and will need multiperspectivism. This introductory guide proposed an integrated approach, starting from the definition of a vision and describing three concrete steps within the context of Ghent University, that programmes can put into practice. All this in order to guarantee that internationalisation can be used as a strong means to offer qualitative programmes, ensuring that graduates are internationally / interculturally competent.

Implementation Plan

Action	Involved	Timing
Organising an internal UGent Conference for sharing good practices on the internationalisation of the curriculum (this will include former "I@H"-projects and others alike)	All UGent-staff IRO organises	November 2015
Exploring the possibilities to transfer acknowledged good practices from other institutions (in Flanders, the Netherlands and other parts of Europe) as included in the Good Practices on Internationalisation Platforms of NVAO and ECA to the UGent context	IRO coordinates	August – September 2015
Presenting at faculty level the policy and introductory guide on international and intercultural competences for all Ghent University graduates (e.g. at meetings of the Faculty Committee on Internationalisation)	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	September – October 2015
Supporting programmes/faculties in the development of a vision on internationalisation [possibly as part of a broader vision]	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	November – December 2015
Supporting programmes/faculties in defining and describing the programmes' international / intercultural competences [as part of the overall implementation of the Ghent University's competence model within the faculty/programme]	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	Depending on faculty timing
Supporting programmes/faculties in creating a variety of learning experiences for students to allow the achievement of the envisaged international / intercultural competences [as part of an overall approach to teaching and learning]	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	Depending on faculty timing
Supporting programmes/faculties in defining a strategy to work towards measuring the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural competences [taking into account the overall testing principles of Ghent University]	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	Depending on faculty timing
Organising and supporting faculty-level initiatives to raise awareness	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	Open offer
Investigating the possibility to give incentives (financially or otherwise) to programmes to invest in the internationalisation of the curricula	Policy coordinator for international.	November – December 2015
Supporting programmes interested in labelling their internationalisation practices <i>(also see annex)</i>	Faculties (FCI/FDO) IRO	Open offer

Annex: Framework for the assessment of quality in internationalisation

In the framework of the project "Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation" (CeQuInt) of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), *Frameworks for the assessment of quality in internationalisation* were developed, including one at the programme level. This framework can also serve very well as an interesting self-reflection instrument for programmes wanting to evaluate where they are in the development of their internationalisation.

Standard 1:	Intended internationalisation
Criterion 1a:	Supported goals <i>The internationalisation goals for the programme are documented and these are shared and supported by stakeholders within and outside the programme.</i>
Criterion 1b:	Verifiable objectives <i>Verifiable objectives have been formulated that allow monitoring the achievement of the programme's internationalisation goals.</i>
Criterion 1c:	Measures for improvement <i>As a result of periodic evaluations of the programme's internationalisation, the successful implementation of measures for improvement can be demonstrated.</i>
Assessment:	Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent
Standard 2:	International and intercultural learning
Criterion 2a:	Intended learning outcomes <i>The intended international and intercultural learning outcomes defined by the programme are a clear reflection of its internationalisation goals.</i>
Criterion 2b:	Student assessment <i>The methods used for the assessment of students are suitable for measuring the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.</i>
Criterion 2c:	Graduate achievement <i>The achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes by the programme's graduates can be demonstrated.</i>
Assessment:	Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent

Standard 3:		Teaching and Learning
Criterion 3a:	Curriculum	<i>The content and structure of the curriculum provide the necessary means for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.</i>
Criterion 3b:	Teaching methods	<i>The teaching methods are suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.</i>
Criterion 3c:	Learning environment	<i>The learning environment is suitable for achieving the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.</i>
Assessment:	Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent	

Standard 4:		Staff
Criterion 4a:	Composition	<i>The composition of the staff (in quality and quantity) facilitates the achievement of the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes.</i>
Criterion 4b:	Experience	<i>Staff members have sufficient internationalisation experience, intercultural competences and language skills.</i>
Criterion 4c:	Services	<i>The services provided to the staff (e.g. training, facilities, staff exchanges) are consistent with the staff composition and facilitate international experiences, intercultural competences and language skills.</i>
Assessment:	Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent	

Standard 5:	Students
<p>Criterion 5a:</p>	<p>Composition <i>The composition of the student group (national and cultural backgrounds) is in line with the programme's internationalisation goals.</i></p>
<p>Criterion 5b:</p>	<p>Experience <i>The internationalisation experience gained by students is adequate and corresponds to the programme's internationalisation goals.</i></p>
<p>Criterion 5c:</p>	<p>Services <i>The services provided to the students (e.g. information provision, counselling, guidance, accommodation, Diploma Supplement) are adequate and correspond to the composition of the student group.</i></p>
<p>Assessment:</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good or excellent</p>