The ICI Framework

Enhancing the Quality of Education through Inclusive Comprehensive Internationalisation: The ICI Framework

Introduction

The ICI framework is a tool that supports Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) exploration and reflection on the inclusivity of their internationalisation strategy and daily activities with a focus on internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask, 2015) and assuring access to internationalisation for every student. The curriculum is interpreted in its broadest sense and includes "the formal, informal and hidden curriculum as well as the support services of a programme of study" (Leask, 2015, p. 9).

The **formal curriculum** refers to the credit-bearing syllabus and includes the intended learning outcomes, the associated teaching and learning activities, experiences, and the assessment of student learning. It consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities students participate in, as well as the knowledge and skills educators intentionally teach, enabling their learning (e.g., Mackin et al., 2019).

The **informal curriculum**, also referred to as the co-curriculum, is typically described as a set of co-curricular activities. It consists of various support services and additional social activities linked to a program of study, organised by student associations, clubs, or the university (UKEssays, 2018). While the activities in the informal curriculum are not credit-bearing, they may enhance the learning experience of students. Examples include volunteer work or optional study trips.

The **hidden curriculum** refers to the unwritten, implicit, and often unintended messages, values, norms, and perspectives communicated to students (Mackin et al.,

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2019) through both the formal and informal curriculum. It can be seen as a socialisation process that involves the transfer of values, norms, and procedures conveyed through an institution's culture and structure, and encompasses how things are done, whose knowledge counts, and whose voices are considered. The hidden curriculum, whether intentional or unintentional, often remains concealed as the related values, norms, and procedures are taken for granted by the dominant majority at an institution. Moreover, the messages conveyed by the hidden curriculum can be interpreted differently by various student groups. This hidden curriculum may negatively impact access to international learning opportunities and the performance of students from specific and underrepresented groups. These students may be unfamiliar with the implicit values, norms, and procedures known to the dominant majority, or they may struggle to adopt them. Since these aspects are often taken for granted, educators may not realise that their practices unintentionally send messages that hinder access to international learning opportunities for certain student groups.

The ICI framework and accompanying *self-assessment tool* aim to uncover potential hidden messages in the formal and informal curriculum across different modalities (physical, face to face, virtual or blended). These messages hinder students from fully benefitting from internationalisation. These hidden messages can be perceived differently by various student groups. Exploring the inclusivity of internationalisation efforts is not only relevant for underrepresented student groups (which may intersect), who often miss out on international learning opportunities. Exclusionary policies and practices also lead to missed opportunities for the dominant majority to learn from and with their peers. The ICI framework provides a standard of excellence for HEIs who aim to reflect on and enhance their own approach to inclusive internationalisation. It includes:

- A definition of inclusive internationalisation (PR1)
- A multidimensional model, consisting of three dimensions as indicators for inclusivity and one underlying driver, i.e., boundary-crossing competence (PR 1)
- An ICI institutional self-assessment tool (PR1)
- Guidelines for performing and interpreting a self-assessment process (PR2)

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- Examples of good practice (PR5)

The ICI framework is grounded in a literature review on which we will report separately. This framework was developed iteratively with input from all university partners in the ICI project, who tested it using a 360-review process involving a wide range of students, and academic and administrative staff (self-assessment). In this endeavour the project takes a systemic approach, involving the university as a comprehensive whole. This systemic approach is operationalised by analysing the internationalisation of HEIs based on the six pillars inspired by the model of comprehensive internationalisation (ACE, n.d.). These pillars include institutional commitment and policy, leadership and structure, curriculum and co-curriculum, faculty and support staff, mobility, and partnerships. This framework first discusses the draft definition and model of inclusive internationalisation. The second part discusses what inclusive internationalisation implies for each of the six pillars.

Proposed definition of Inclusive Internationalisation

The partners of the ICI project have developed the following definition of inclusive internationalisation:

> Inclusive internationalisation is a continuous critical institutional dialogue transformed into purposeful action by all stakeholders in the university to ensure every student has the opportunity to benefit from internationalisation based on the values of transparency, equity, and respect.

Inclusive internationalisation from a systemic perspective refers to leadership skills for imagining an institutional vision for inclusive internationalisation, and how this can be achieved through the planning, implementation, and evaluation of international strategies, policies, and actions. It includes both the processes for developing inclusive strategies, policies and practices as well as the outcomes of these processes as perceived by a wide range of stakeholders within and beyond the institution.

The ICI definition asserts that such institutional dialogue is a continuous process, framing the pursuit of inclusivity as a collaborative effort of 'being in becoming'. HEIs are dynamic institutions that frequently welcome new, increasingly diverse and

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international student cohorts. Moreover, HEIs need to be aware of and respond to the changing needs of society and their communities, tailoring their education accordingly. This dynamic continuously changes the conditions and context for inclusivity.

The institutional dialogue mentioned in the ICI definition must be critical, encouraging stakeholders to reflect on their own assumptions pertaining to inclusive internationalisation and its daily practice at their institution. Furthermore, this dialogue needs to be collaborative, raising the awareness of unintended and systemic implications of actions. Based on this self-reflection, HEIs need to be prepared to take critical action (Barnett, 1997) in their strategies, policies and practices to ensure every student has equitable opportunities to benefit from internationalisation. To support the institutional self-reflection on the inclusiveness of internationalisation, the ICI definition is operationalised in an ICI multidimensional model which includes three dimensions with measurable indicators and one underlying driver. The definition and the model provide the foundation on which the ICI self-assessment tool has been built.

Proposed multidimensional ICI model

The ICI multidimensional model illustrates the connection between strategic intent and desired outcomes for inclusive internationalisation. Strategic intent refers to the goals, objectives and actions aimed at achieving inclusive internationalisation reaching every student, and how these are prioritised within institutional management cycles and in resourcing. The actual outcomes of strategic intent, however, may range from intended to unintended positive or negative outcomes for inclusive internationalisation. Negative outcomes may point to blockers and intended or unintended systemic institutional discrimination. Both positive intended and unintended outcomes may highlight systemic approaches that enable internationalisation for all students.

The literature identifies three dimensions of inclusivity that influence the relationship between an institution's strategic intent for inclusive internationalisation and its intended and unintended positive or negative outcomes. These dimensions are influence, attitude, and transparency. Furthermore, achieving the desired outcome depends on the stakeholders' ability to engage across disciplinary and administrative

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contexts, cultures, and languages. This ability to learn from and co-create with others outside one's own context is referred to as boundary-crossing competence (Wageningen University, n.d.). The ICI multidimensional model is visualised in Figure 1.

Dimensions of inclusivity

Influence pertains to how power is distributed and whether various student stakeholder groups are equitably positioned to affect an institution's internationalisation strategy, its policies, and activities. The dimension of **influence** ranges from identification, participation, representation, and co-creation. It addresses how various student stakeholder groups are identified, and who identifies them; which blockers and enablers influence their participation in international opportunities; how students are involved in decision making about accessible internationalisation opportunities; and how they contribute to the co-creation of a diverse portfolio of such opportunities in the curriculum to engage all students.

Attitude refers to openness to and respect for the specific characteristics of various student stakeholder groups and how these traits are regarded intrinsically valuable to all students. The dimension of **attitude** ranges from ad hoc or limited deficit approaches to systemic asset-based approaches (Godbey et al., 2018). A deficit attitude focusses on fixing the issues students are struggling with. In an asset approach, the value of what every student brings to the university is recognised and how the university system needs to change to enable all students to contribute. In an ad hoc deficit approach, the HEI is reactive to exclusionary policies and practices. It only addresses these when they surface with a focus on solving students' issues of exclusion. A systemic deficit approach, though proactive, still views underrepresented students as the problem, with its policies and practices aimed at fixing or bringing them up to standard. In an ad hoc asset approach, valuing diversity is incidental and associated with efforts of individual members of an HEI. A systemic asset approach positions the system as the blocker and focusses on the intrinsic value of underrepresented students. It is grounded in values of equity and respect and demonstrates a genuine desire to provide international learning opportunities for all students.
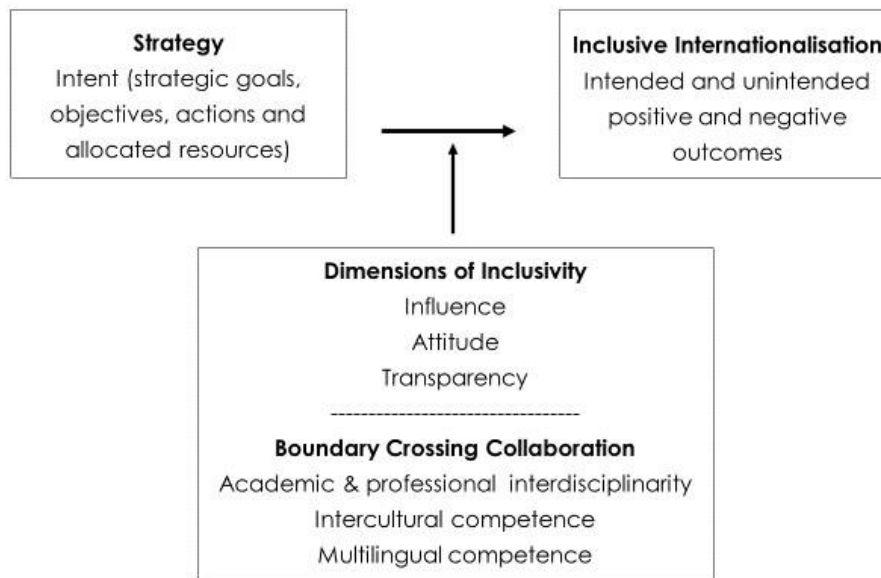
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Figure 1: The ICI model for inclusive internationalisation (Source: Authors)

Transparency refers to access to information, encompassing both how messages and information are communicated and tailored to different student groups, and how decisions are made about who has access to specific information. The dimension of transparency refers to the communication of international learning opportunities and ranges from being known to all, known only to the dominant majority and hidden from some student stakeholder groups, known to some student stakeholder groups and hidden from the dominant majority, to being hidden from all (Luft & Ingham, 1961). This dimension aims to uncover both hidden and overt messages that hinder equity in access to international learning opportunities.

Boundary-crossing competence

Working towards inclusive internationalisation necessitates collaboration within an institution among multiple stakeholders who hold different interests, perspectives, and needs. In the context of the ICI project, boundary-crossing collaboration is understood as the stakeholders' ability to successfully work with colleagues and students who have diverse cultural perspectives, values, and beliefs. This collaboration may involve

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communication in multiple languages or using different language styles, and extending beyond one's own disciplinary or administrative domains.

Interdisciplinarity is understood within the ICI project as the ability to collaborate across academic and administrative units within a HEI to advance inclusive internationalisation and involve students as equal partners in this process. Achieving inclusivity for an HEI as a whole requires a systemic approach, which encompasses governance, the curriculum, academic and administrative staff, and students. This is not an easy task, given the structural power differences among these various stakeholders in governance, education, and the administrative services. Crossing the boundaries of one's domain to learn from other knowledges, practices and perspectives requires an attitude of openness and respect, as well as a willingness to share power when co-creating inclusive internationalisation opportunities.

Intercultural Competence (ICC) is identified within the ICI project as a crucial element of boundary-crossing competence for achieving inclusivity in internationalisation. A widely accepted definition of ICC refers to the capability to navigate intercultural interactions effectively and appropriately (Deardorff, 2006). Building on this, Gregersen-Hermans (2021) delineated ICC into three higher-order learning goals: intentional awareness of diversity, empathic understanding of cultural differences, and collaborative engagement in intercultural contact. The ICI project has adapted these higher-order learning goals into conditions for working towards inclusivity, which include (1) the institutional capability to intentionally be aware of and identify various student groups; (2) empathetic understanding of their specific capabilities, constraints, and communication styles; and (3) the ability to effectively collaborate with these specific student groups and other institutional stakeholders to develop systemic inclusive policies and practices. These conditions are interdependent and contribute to the dimensions of inclusivity (i.e., influence, attitude, and transparency).

Language capability and paralanguage are integrated into each of the three dimensions mentioned above and are also regarded as critical elements of boundarycrossing competence for achieving inclusivity in the ICI project. *Language capability* refers primarily to the capability of the institution to communicate with the

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different student groups in a way that resonates with them. Secondly, it refers to the fluency of various student groups in the language used in instruction, governance and institutional services, enabling their engagement with internationalisation at the systemic level. *Paralanguage* refers to the nonverbal elements of communication (such as pitch, accent, and tone of voice) and cultural differences in communication styles, which can potentially influence interactions between various stakeholders within the university system.

The level of systemic awareness and capability regarding the roles of interdisciplinarity, intercultural competence, language, and paralanguage—and how they intersect with the three dimensions— determines how inclusive internationalisation strategies and practices are at a given institution. The multidimensional ICI model offers a systemic understanding of how HEIs achieve their strategic intent for inclusive internationalisation, while also helping to identify potential gaps, blind spots, or unintended hidden consequences. Critical and continuous selfreflection on the HEIs' systemic approach to inclusivity in internationalisation can be the first step towards actually achieving the desired outcome. The framework, inspired by the American Council on Education ACE model (n.d.) for comprehensive internationalisation, offers a tool to conduct this self-assessment.

The six pillars of the ACE Comprehensive Internationalisation Framework

To facilitate a systemic self-assessment of internationalisation, policies and practices are analysed based on the six pillars of comprehensive internationalisation (ACE, n.d.). It is expected that internationalisation strategies, along with their accompanying policies and practices, will vary among partner HEIs, each tailored to its local context and priorities. Analysing approaches to inclusive internationalisation for each ACE pillar offers a comprehensive overview for each partner, allowing for comparisons between them. The six ACE pillars are visualised in Figure 2. The questions in the ICI SelfAssessment Tool are structured around these six pillars of inclusive internationalisation. The following sections outline each dimension of the ACE model for comprehensive internationalisation and explain how these have been adapted to the specific aims and focus of the ICI project.

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Institutional commitment and policy

Inclusive internationalisation requires prioritisation in an institution's strategic plan. In the self-assessment, we examine the explicit commitment to inclusive internationalisation by institutional leaders. The questions further explore how strategies and policies are aligned to institutionalise this commitment, and how inclusive internationalisation is ensured—through planning, implementation, and monitoring—, so that it extends beyond a mere public statement. In some HEIs, this commitment is integrated into the overall institutional strategy, while others may choose to include it explicitly in a separate international strategy.
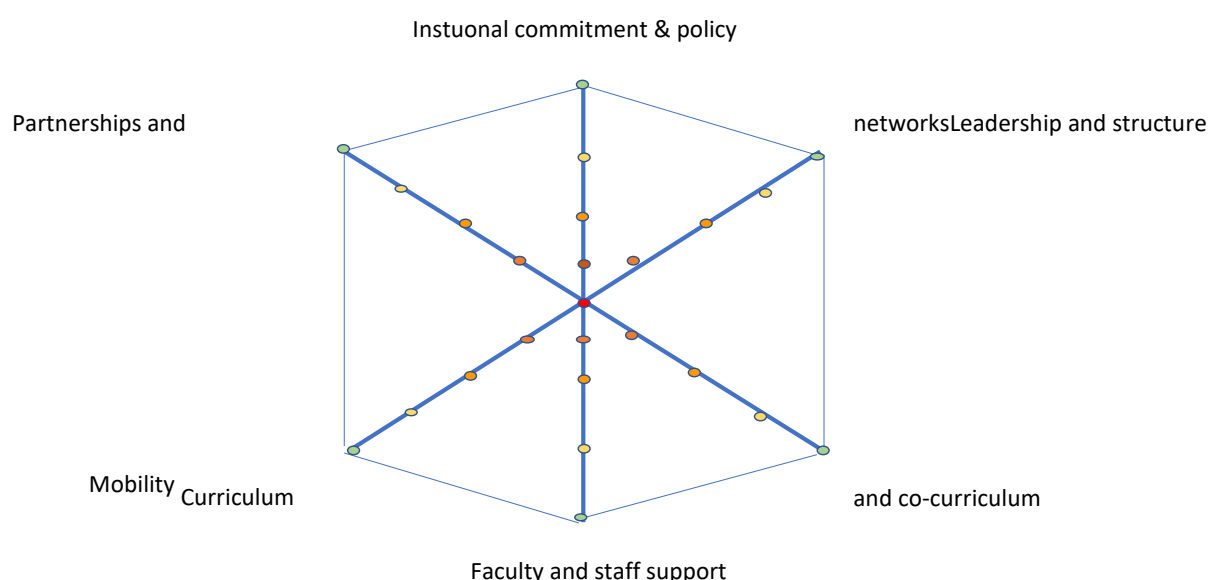

Figure 2: The six pillars of comprehensive internationalisation (ACE, n.d.)

Leadership and structure

Leadership and structure refer to the systemic elements of the university organisation and the management actions that aim to ensure internationalisation is or becomes inclusive. Here we focus on two aspects. Firstly, how is it ensured, at a systemic level, that the strategy and policies are effectively implemented and monitored for their

outcomes and impact? In other words, which plan-do-check-act (PDCA) management cycle is in place to support the continuous and critical dialogue? Secondly, what influence do specific student groups have, and how are they included in the decision-making process?

Curriculum and co-curriculum

The curriculum serves as the central pathway to learning for all students regardless of their background, goals, or abilities. An internationalised curriculum ensures that all students are exposed to global perspectives and develop intercultural competence. This is achieved by incorporating these elements into the institution's learning outcomes and assessments. In the self-assessment we examine the formal, informal, and hidden curriculum and the administrative services. We evaluate measures and quality mechanisms within the management cycles to ensure the staff walk the talk and to identify and address any 'hidden messages' that contradict the institution's commitment to inclusivity. In the ICI project, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is integrated into the formal curriculum.

Staff and faculty support

As primary drivers of inclusive internationalisation, faculty and administrative staff play a pivotal role in student learning. To support staff, institutional policies and support mechanisms should provide opportunities for ongoing professional development and the enhancement of boundary-crossing competencies. In the self-assessment, we explore how lecturers and administrative staff are supported implementing inclusive internationalisation. Questions include how all staff should provide opportunities for ongoing professional development and the enhancement of boundary-crossing competencies for working in an internationalised university context.

Mobility

Mobility encompasses both the outward and inward physical movement of people (students, faculty, and administrative staff), as well as programs, projects, and policies to off-campus communities and other countries for learning, professional development, or collaboration. Given that the focus of ICI is on students, the

selfassessment explores the accessibility of outgoing mobility for specific student groups and how incoming mobility is integrated into the curriculum to benefit every student.

Partnerships and Networks

Partnerships and networks, whether internal and external, can be local or international. They can be primarily transactional or generate new ideas and programmes spanning all partners. They bring different viewpoints, resources, activities, and agendas together to illuminate and act on global issues. These partnerships offer global and intercultural experiences for faculty, administrative staff, and students, while also enriching the curriculum. In the self-assessment, we examine how partnerships and networks offer professional development opportunities for staff and access to international learning experiences for students (e.g., mobility, COIL).

For each pillar of the ACE model, the accompanying ICI self-assessment tool includes relevant questions. This tool is designed to help HEIs reflect on their approach to internationalisation. Part one of the self-assessment examines the institution's stated or desired position through desk research. Part two takes the form of a semi-structured protocol for interviews and/or focus groups, aiming to identify the actual real-life experiences and perceptions of relevant stakeholders within an institution.

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