A global survey by the International Association of Universities has concluded that future developments and reforms of higher education will give a central place to the internationalisation process, write its co-authors EVA EGRON-POLAK and ROSS HUDSON. But the global economic crisis will most likely slow down - or impose some limits on - certain internationalisation activities.

The IAU's 3rd Global Survey Report, *Internationalisation of Higher Education: Global trends, regional perspectives*, is based on the analysis of survey responses from 745 institutions in 115 countries from all regions of the world, as well as a number of national university associations.

It represents the most geographically comprehensive collection and analysis of data on the internationalisation of higher education ever undertaken. Previous editions of the Global Survey were published in 2003 and 2005.

Analysing such a large, diverse and rich mass of data, and comparing it across different institutions and regions as well as over time, is quite complex. Many of the findings on the key issues related to internationalisation provide interesting new insights. This is also the case when the results of the 3rd Global Survey are compared to the 2005 survey in a few areas.

It is well known that internationalisation has become increasingly important for higher education institutions, as numerous government policy documents, international conferences and institutional debates can attest.

Indeed 87% of institutions surveyed include mention of internationalisation in their overall strategic plan, and 78% see internationalisation as having increased or substantially increased in importance within their institution over the past three years.

Furthermore, it is significant to note that in almost 50% of surveyed institutions that indicate they have funding for internationalisation, the level of such funding has increased over the past three years. In those institutions that have a dedicated internationalisation policy, there has been an increase in the percentage that also have:

* A specific budget for internationalisation activities (from 65% in 2005 to 73% in the 3rd Global Survey).
* A monitoring framework for internationalisation (from 53% to 72%).
* A dedicated office for internationalisation (71% to 85%).

However, the results also show that 'lack of funding' has become the most important internal and external barrier to advancing internationalisation within institutions. This is in striking contrast to the results of the 2005 survey, in which lack of financial support for internationalisation was not seen as significant and was not among the top three obstacles identified.

The economic crisis, which was already impacting on institutions at the time the data collection was underway, therefore presents significant challenges in maintaining the level of activity required to fulfill their internationalisation goals.

Outgoing mobility for students, student exchanges, and attracting international students are the highest priority activities within institutional internationalisation policies. These are also among the most costly activities; when juxtaposed against the lack of funding, the challenge becomes clear.

This is further confirmed when we note that in the majority of surveyed institutions, the percentage of full-time international students enrolled in higher education institutions and the percentage able to spend time overseas as part of their study programme, remain low.

International student mobility remains an activity reserved for a select few.

The survey also confirmed growing interest in the development of joint and-or dual/double degree programmes.

In the results of the 3rd Global Survey, this activity was ranked as the 4th-highest (out of 18 options) priority in terms of receiving attention and resources in surveyed institutions. In the 2005 Survey, and although the questions asked in the two surveys were slightly different, the development of joint and dual/double degree programmes with international partners was ranked substantially lower in terms of priority activities.
It is noteworthy as well that the results show fairly pronounced differences in preference for each of these two approaches (joint or dual/double degree programmes), depending on world region. In most cases they are also being developed more frequently at the postgraduate level.

Given the IAU’s mandate and membership, it has great interest in global trends, so the results presented in the report are usually analysed first at the global level.

The survey’s most important contribution, however, is in demonstrating the extent to which regional and/or national contexts and priorities, as well as the priorities of higher education leaders, have direct implications for which internationalisation activities are pursued, what obstacles are encountered, and how benefits or risks are perceived.

To explore these differences thoroughly, the report analyses and compares institutional data and results by region and includes a specific section in which experts on internationalisation of higher education from different parts of the world discuss certain key findings related to the internationalisation processes in their regions.

Which regions of the world are the most attractive or at least of highest interest in internationalisation policies?

The survey findings are consistent with the results from 2005, with Europe being overall the most important region for those institutions which identify regional priorities.

The results also show that there continues to be a strong pattern of intra-regional priority within internationalisation policies, with half of the world’s six regions (Africa, Asia and Pacific, and Europe) citing their own region as the top geographic priority for internationalisation activities.

The results of the IAU 3rd Global Survey show that future developments and reforms of higher education will give a central place to the internationalisation process. The report also points out that the current global economic crisis will most likely slow down - or impose some limits on - certain internationalisation activities.

Given the fact that so much of internationalisation efforts have become focused on students, and preparing them for a more globalised world, it may spark increased interest in ‘internationalisation at home’ activities as an alternative to the more costly mobility or exchange schemes.

On the other hand, if resources are a major constraint, one of the risks of internationalisation identified in the survey - increased commercialisation and commodification of higher education - may become an even greater threat, as institutions look for ways to finance their activities.

Developing new and innovative ways to resource internationalisation is perhaps one of the most important challenges facing higher education leaders.

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