

**UK Universities' Global Engagement Strategies:  
Time for a rethink?**

**OVERVIEW OF KEY QUESTIONS  
for HEIs to ask**



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## Overview of key questions for HEIs to ask

In my consultancy work, I find that putting time and effort into coming up with the right questions to ask during the consultation phase of new strategy development – or when a strategy is being reviewed – pays huge dividends. They can be used to stimulate valuable discussions with a range of different stakeholders, serving to challenge assumptions, spark ideas derived from divergent thinking and, ultimately, make the strategy itself richer, more sustainable, more distinctive, and more reflective of institutional values, mission and character.

This is why I conclude each chapter in Part 3 (*Next generation strategies: Where are we heading?*) of my main Global Strategies Report with a set of questions. It is hoped that these will provide a useful prompt for leaders within HEIs as they engage in discussions on the future shape of their global engagement strategy.

This paper provides a collated overview of the key questions raised.

## Considering the 'why': drivers and differentiation

### Key questions:

- How is the institution's approach to global engagement going to reflect its values and support its mission?
- How can the perspectives of those who challenge western and Anglosphere-orientated notions of internationalisation be considered?
- How will the institution negotiate government policies in a way that is true to its values?
- How is the HEI going to 'be international' in this post-Covid context? Will it, for example, address head on issues of climate impact and inequality?
- How will it differentiate itself? Are there global engagement principles that the university community cares about strongly enough to take a public stand?

## Addressing global – and local – challenges

### Key questions:

- How embedded is sustainable development within institutional strategy and what are the implications for global engagement priorities?
- How can climate impact considerations be addressed within our strategy?
- What synergies exist between equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), social and racial justice, and international education? Could these be harnessed within our strategy?
- What benefits could our global engagement bring to our local / regional community and how might our civic engagement activities have positive international impact?
- Are there tensions that need to be resolved between the agendas mentioned in the above questions?

## **Negotiating new global dynamics**

### **Key questions:**

- How does our global engagement strategy address the ethical dimension of building international relationships?
- Does our portfolio of potential partner countries support our institutional mission, spread risk and ensure diversity?
- Are we prepared to invest in building relationships in / with countries not prioritised by the UK Government?
- What strategies can we put in place to build understanding of our partner countries' priorities and to enhance the ability of our staff and students to engage globally? Will these strategies extend to the nurturing of intercultural and linguistic competencies?

## **Rethinking partnership models**

### **Key questions:**

- How can international partnerships help to achieve our institutional goals – and those of our partners?
- What potential is there for more holistic partnerships?
- What will the position of TNE be within our education portfolio? What benefits are we (and our TNE partners and students) aiming for?
- What needs to happen for us to develop truly flexible provision?
- What would be the benefits of working with new types of partner, including those in the private sector? And the challenges?
- Are there ways in which greater collaboration – with UK-based HEIs or global networks – could help us to achieve our goals?

## **'Internationalisation for All' in a digital world**

### **Key questions:**

- What investments are we prepared to make in order to extend the benefits of internationalisation to all members of the institutional community?
- How can we ensure the views and voices of our diverse students, alumni and staff inform our approach to internationalisation?
- What approaches will we use to make outward mobility accessible to students from disadvantaged / underrepresented backgrounds?
- What support do staff need in order to embed global perspectives and intercultural experiences into curricula and to foster global integration?
- Do we need to stimulate debates about the relationship between decolonisation and internationalisation to determine common principles for curricular reform?
- What is going to be different about our future students' pre-enrolment experience?
- How will we address the needs and expectations of international parents?
- What are we willing to invest in enhancing international students' employability (whether they choose to stay in the UK or return home)?
- What opportunities can we offer our alumni to help them feel like life-long partners within our global community?
- What are the development needs of staff, as we seek to broaden the pool of those who are internationally engaged and extend the ways in which such engagement can take place?

## Alternative operating practices

### Key questions:

- How can we ensure key stakeholders see themselves reflected in our strategy?
- What needs to change in order for us to deliver our strategy in a more agile way with ongoing review?
- What is needed from leadership roles in the area of global engagement?
- What mechanisms are needed to help foster cross-institutional debates on internationalisation and to support the bringing together of expertise from different areas of the institution?
- What remit and configuration will our international office (or equivalent) have in the new landscape?
- What active changes need to be made – in policies and behaviours – to show true commitment to our agreed strategic priorities?

## New ways of measuring success

### Key questions:

- How can we best align our metrics with the most important priorities articulated in our strategy?
- Are there imaginative ways to measure the impact of our actions?
- What is the ideal balance between harder and softer KPIs?
- Which sub-measures best support (and flesh out) our institutional KPIs?
- Are we confident that the KPIs we have selected are actionable, measurable and purposeful (not just vanity metrics)?
- How exactly do our KPIs help us to improve our performance in agreed areas?
- Are rankings an essential part of the mix and, if so, which elements of the strategy do they support? Which measures are needed to address those priorities not touched by the rankings?
- How do our chosen metrics reflect our distinctiveness as an institution?
- Are there alternative measures of progress that we should consider?
- Do our metrics resonate with the priorities of our key stakeholders, based on their experience of the institution?

## About the author



Dr Vicky Lewis is an independent consultant, who specialises in working with Higher Education providers to develop or refine international strategies, infrastructure and implementation plans.

Clients have ranged from small, specialist institutions just setting out on their internationalisation journey to Russell Group universities with an impressive global footprint. Since establishing her business in 2013, Vicky has worked with numerous UK-based HEIs as well as providers located in Germany, France, Sweden, Malaysia, Israel and the US.

Vicky's consultancy expertise draws on both professional experience and academic research. Before becoming a consultant, she worked for 19 years within UK universities (in Wales, Scotland and England). This included 13 years at Senior Management Team level at Bournemouth University, where she was initially appointed to set up an International Office from scratch and progressed to become Director of Marketing & Communications, leading a large, multi-function team.

In 2007, Vicky completed the University of Bath's DBA (Higher Education Management) with a thesis on 'integrated internationalism' within UK HEIs. Subsequent research has focused on transnational education and on institutional strategies for internationalisation and global engagement.

Vicky is a regular speaker at international conferences on a range of internationalisation-related topics. She is a keen blogger (see: <https://www.vickylewisconsulting.co.uk/news-and-views.php>), a Consulting Fellow with Halpin Partnership and an active member of the European Association for International Education.

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