

Elisabeth Brunner-Sobanski / Alma Šehić

CeQulnt meets Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences

Requirements and objectives of the Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation in the context of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences

115 - Successful Internationalization in Higher Education

Abstract

This conceptual paper aims at discussing the content of the Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation (CeQulnt) label and its application in the context of the Austrian universities of applied sciences (UAS). We take a closer look at the legal framework as well as literature on Austrian UAS. The discussion shows that the legal framework enables the principles of CeQulnt. However, there might be a gap between what is put in practice and the holistic approach which CeQulnt aspires to. We also see that the involvement of students and staff at Austrian UAS entails opportunities for internationalisation (e.g. diversity of the student body), coupled also with challenges (e.g. integration of external lecturers). The discussion of CeQulnt standards shows that intra-organisational cooperation and the development of an organisational culture supportive of internationalisation are a precondition for a higher education institution being awarded a CeQulnt certificate.

Keywords:

Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation, international and intercultural learning outcomes, assessment in international education, internationalisation of the curriculum, universities of applied sciences

1. Introduction

The „Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation“ (CeQulnt) launched by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) is the first European quality label awarded for internationalisation at programme level as well as institutional. CeQulnt sets quality standards for internationalisation and aims to reward those study programmes and accordingly, institutions which incorporate internationalisation in a sustainable manner. The diverse contexts in which internationalisation takes place are taken into consideration, as well as the process-oriented dimension of internationalisation. The approach of CeQulnt is a holistic one, involving and affecting different stakeholders, taking into account different strategies of disciplines and study programmes and focused on students and their development of international and intercultural competencies (Aerden / Weber 2013).

CeQulnt addresses the question of how students can be best prepared for an increasingly interconnected and globalised world – as professionals and individuals. As traditional internationalisation instruments such as student mobility are only partly fulfilling this goal, internationalising the curriculum and teaching and learning (also referred as Internationalisation at Home) are moving more and more in the focus of international education. CeQulnt builds on the definition of internationalisation of the curriculum by Betty Leask¹ and responds to the claim that internationalisation should address *all* students through the domestic curriculum, not just a minority of mobile ones (see new definition of IaH: Beelen, Jones 2015: 69).

This conceptual paper aims at discussing the content of the CeQulnt label and its application in the context of the Austrian universities of applied sciences (UAS).² We take a closer look at the legal framework as well as the literature on Austrian UAS covering different aspects of the UAS context (e.g. teaching, students, lecturers). The paper highlights the chances and challenges UAS might have to tackle when applying for the CeQulnt label, and at the same time the article aims at fostering the self-reflection of UAS with regard to internationalisation of their study programmes. Firstly, we introduce the CeQulnt assessment. We then discuss the foundation of the CeQulnt in light of the Austrian UAS context (referring to the first three CeQulnt assessment standards). Thirdly, we elaborate on the involvement of central stakeholders (CeQulnt assessment standard 4 and 5 cover staff and students).

2. CeQulnt – an overview

The CeQulnt framework consists of five standards each entailing three criteria. The picture below shows the general CeQulnt architecture. Standard one to three display the integration of an internationalisation vision of an entire study programme beginning with the internationalisation goals (standard 1), specific international and intercultural learning outcomes (standard 2) and how they are put in practice in teaching and learning (standard 3). The first three standards which present the foundation of the CeQulnt assessment, mirror the Bologna structure of a study programme and emphasise a strategically aligned study programme.

The last two standards discuss the composition and experience staff and students (standard 4 and 5) as well as the services provided to these two groups. These standards thus focus more on the central stakeholders involved in internationalisation.

CeQulnt's approach has to be viewed in the context of the discussion on "re-conceptualization of internationalisation" (Aerden et al. 2011: 57) and measurement of the quality in internationalisation. Obviously this approach does not allow higher education institutions to pick from the pool of internationalization measures without a definition of the outcomes and their integration in the study

¹ „Internationalization of the curriculum is the incorporation of international and intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study.“ (Leask 2015: 9)

² The paper limits itself to the description of the requirements at programme level. The certification at institutional level aims just as well at study programmes with a view to the entire higher education institution.

programme. Thus CeQInt follows the call for a shift from “fragmented, rather unrelated activities” such as “development of partnerships, outgoing student mobility, teaching in English,...” to “internationalisation as a process and a concept, which is broader and altogether more meaningful and more important to both to society and to the individual.” (de Wit et al. 2013: 232). De Wit and colleagues (2013) stress the importance of a discussion at the institutional level when he states that “if we are to succeed in using the internationalisation of higher education as a means of improving the quality of university curricula around the globe, then the “why” must surely come before the “how”, just as the impact and outcomes of what we are doing should follow the “what”” (de Wit et al. 2013: 233). The CeQInt requirements mirror this holistic approach in internationalisation of higher education institutions as well as study programmes.

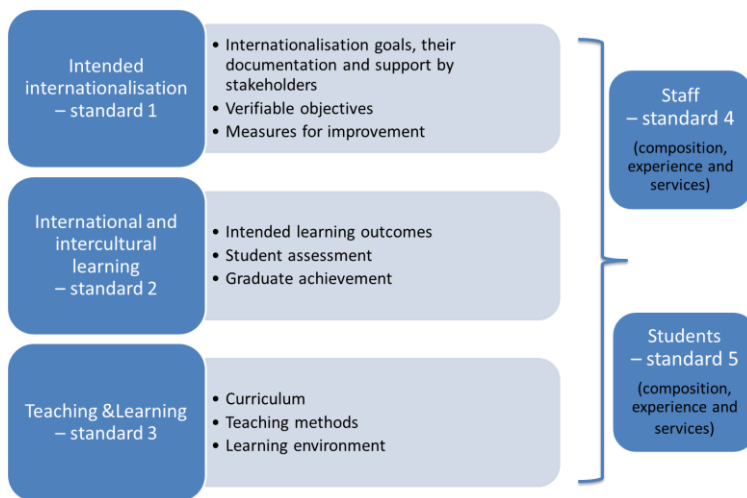


Figure 1: CeQInt standards according to Aerden (2014)

3. The foundation of the CeQInt label in light of the Austrian UAS context

The internationalisation agenda of Austria UAS is strongly influenced by their **educational mandate** – defined by the University of Applied Sciences Act (FHStG) – which provides practice-oriented education at a higher education level (FHStG § 3 (1)). Preparing students for the professional field and enabling them to adequately confront current and future demands of their working environment (Hauer 2013: 200), is for some study programmes a strong argument in favour of internationalisation and for equipping their students with global skills in order to succeed in an increasingly globalised working environment. Meanwhile others claim that the strong ties with the local labour market make internationalisation unnecessary.

The Austrian **legal framework** fully enables the Bologna architecture that the CeQInt requires. Overall, it can be said that the outcome-oriented description of study programmes in the Austrian UAS context is stimulated by the „Fachhochschul-Akkreditierungsverordnung“ (FH-AV), where learning outcomes have to be described in the qualification profile (FH-AV § 17 (1) e) and the modules of a study programme (FH-AV § 17 (1) j). However there is no need to formulate either international goals or international and intercultural learning outcomes on the programme level. The need to formulate learning outcomes related to international and intercultural matters evolves from the legal obligation to

develop a programme that meets academic as well as professional standards of a particular field (FH-AV § 17 (1) e).

The internationalisation of study programmes in the Austrian UAS context is driven by economic rationales as well as by efforts to develop the global understanding of the students. Internationalisation at the programme level can take different forms such as joint/double degree programmes, programmes taught in English, integrated compulsory mobility windows, courses and activities to develop intercultural competences (Werner 2014: 171). Although all these approaches have an international orientation, the rationales differ widely and go from developing intercultural understanding for all students to a more marketing driven approach such as recruiting fee-paying students and promising mobility options for a small elite group of students. CeQuInt however, requires the decision makers to approach these choices strategically.

The first three standards point out the necessity of an **alignment** between the general internationalisation goals and the international and intercultural learning outcomes. We surmise that such an alignment might be more easily established on paper, whereas the real challenge lies in its transfer into everyday teaching practice (standard 3). The transfer is to be seen as a continuous process of communication and reflection with all staff members. When looking at the staff composition of Austrian UAS chances and challenges become obvious with regard to this requirement of alignment. Bringing academics and practitioners together to discuss the alignment presents itself as an opportunity to expose blind spots, on the one hand. It presents itself as a challenge, on the other, however, due to the extensive resources involved (e.g. time) as well as differing interests that are being brought together.

The assessment of CeQuInt differs from traditional instruments of quality measurement of internationalisation³ by placing learning outcomes at the center of curriculum internationalisation (standard 2). This implies that programmes also have to demonstrate how the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes are achieved by their students and graduates. The **assessment of international and intercultural learning outcomes** takes place in a unique context, which is often more complex than assessing other outcomes “given the more experiential nature of the learning [...], the development and lifelong dimension of intercultural learning, the holistic nature of learning, the importance of learning interventions, and the complexity of the outcomes themselves” (Deardorff 2015: 38). As there is no “one-size-fits-all” assessment approach (Deardorff 2015: 41), UAS cannot assume that all academics are aware of this complexity and are able to apply appropriate assessment methods and tools accordingly. Stakeholder involvement and input (e.g. quality assurance, international educators) as well as staff development for academics and staff could be helpful for establishing a culture of outcome-oriented assessment.

The CeQuInt assessment understands internationalisation as a process, where measures of improvement have to be documented. For this purpose, UAS could employ their compulsory internal quality assurance systems. According to the accreditation directive (FH-AV) **quality assurance** of

³ Overview of instruments: de Wit (2010)

study programmes has to be a component which requests a periodical review of study programmes where external stakeholders (e.g. from the professional field and experts from universities) are involved (FH-AV §17(3)b). This routine of evaluation and documentation is useful for the CeQulnt evaluation process. Standard 1 requires the documentation of the internationalisation goals and standard 2 requires that the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes be demonstrated by graduates.

Standard 1 also points out the need for **stakeholder support**. Due to the relatively small and clear structure of Austrian UAS, the stakeholders are easy to identify. Special attention should be paid to academic staff, especially to study programme directors, who are key players in the process of curriculum internationalisation. Internationalisation of the curriculum is highly dependent on the expertise of academics and it therefore requires the commitment of the programme director, who is willing to motivate his/her team, to invest time and is aware of the implications for teaching and learning. The decision about which international and intercultural competences a student should achieve during his/her studies must be made within the study programme based on the discussion of academics. These goals may well differ in different study programmes and disciplines. It is then up to the whole institution to support, give input, provide resources and share the programme's internationalisation goals. It needs support from the university leadership – managing directors responsible for resources, as well as the heads of the UAS supervisory council responsible for teaching and research – and involvement of support units such as human resource management, professional development, quality assurance and international offices.

4. Staff and students as central stakeholders

Teaching and administrative staff as well as **students** are core stakeholder groups and are therefore explicitly addressed in the CeQulnt assessment. Their composition, their international experience and the services which the higher education institution provides, are all covered by CeQulnt standard 4 and 5.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the UAS teaching context with regard to the **composition of staff** is the coexistence of internal and external (part-time) lecturers. Internal lecturers often work in multidisciplinary teams who cover different disciplines of a study programme (Kiendl-Wendner 2013: 192). This environment provides opportunities for the internationalisation at curricular level. Lecturers from different disciplines can offer a range of perspectives for curriculum internationalisation, such as didactic competences, teaching of foreign languages, soft skills, research in an international context as well as global interconnections of a subject. External lecturers, on the other hand, constitute the majority of lecturers– at some UAS, the percentage of external lecturers is over 80% (!) (Schüll 2013: 75). This is a diverse group of professionals. Some are working in the fields they are actually teaching, some are self-employed as consultants or trainers, and some are academics working at other universities. One has to be aware that their interests and background with regards to theoretical foundation and didactic, are quite diverse. In any case, they rarely have an office at the UAS and thus do not spend much time there. According to the CeQulnt certification, UAS will be hard-pressed to

have appropriate communication structures at hand for facilitating exchange between both groups of lecturers in order to ensure that internationalisation is integrated in the teaching.

UAS as well as the “Österreichische Fachhochschulkonferenz” (FHK) as the association, which represents the UAS sector, offer **services** such as professional training to support their staff to develop intercultural competences. These offers often address teaching and language training (e.g. teaching in an international classroom, teaching in English), while internationalisation of the curriculum requires additional skills and should also focus on topics like curriculum design and how to write and assess international and intercultural learning outcomes. However, the majority of external lecturers is often excluded from these services. UAS who strive for the CeQulnt certification must therefore ensure that their professional training and international staff mobility are available to all the key players who are responsible for the implementation of an internationalised curriculum, including administrative staff as well as internal and external lecturers. In addition, the **internationalisation** level and **experience** of staff members can be stimulated by recruiting strategies and rewarded by career models. Mostly formal selection and recruitment procedures from HR management are only applied for full-time and internal lecturers. External staff is mostly chosen and hired on a rather informal basis and subject only to the purview to the individual team responsible for the study programme. Transparent recruitment procedures as well as requirements for career models such as the UAS professorship could be linked to international experience achieved during the career or gained through staff mobility. In addition, achievements in international (research) projects could be a driver for enhancing the internationalisation experience of staff.

The **composition of students** at UAS is quite diverse in terms of age, educational, professional as well as socio-cultural backgrounds: part time students study alongside with full time students. The social intermix at UAS is higher than at universities⁴. UAS are attractive for students from educationally disadvantaged families because of broader access possibilities⁵ (Unger 2014: 118) and a high level of service orientation. This broad spectrum of the student body is further augmented by students of immigrant backgrounds⁶ and international degree-seeking students as well as incomings students, who are attracted by English taught programmes. Although the diversity of the student body can vary from different UAS and study programmes (Ungar 2011) this rich mixture provides diverse opportunities for **international experiences** such as the implementation of an international classroom or utilizing and drawing from students’ diverse backgrounds a resource for teaching and learning. A variety of study abroad and Internationalisation at Home opportunities are integrated into UAS study programmes and Austrian UAS have developed international networks in higher education (Werner 2014: 171). The UAS context offers several ways to integrate international experiences into the curriculum and they are often connected with the world of work, such as internships abroad as well as

⁴ „2/3 of study beginners at UAS come from families, in which neither their father nor their mother dispose of a general university entrance qualification” (Unger 2014: 118)

⁵ „The highest proportion of students from educational disadvantaged families study in part-time UAS study programmes.“ (Unger 2011)

⁶ 6% of UAS students have an immigrant background, which is less than at Austrian universities (Unger 2014: 121)

“at home” in local residing but international enterprises, projects with local but diverse communities or international research projects in cooperation with companies. A lot of these approaches have already been put into practice. A number of UAS have integrated compulsory mobility windows into their curricula and UAS in Austria are leading when it comes to numbers of students studying an internship abroad (Werner 2014: 171). In addition, students of UAS can avail themselves of several support units and instruments like international offices, international study programme coordinators, buddy networks, Diploma Supplement etc.

In light of the CeQuInt requirements, the diversity of the student body and the variety of internationalisation approaches are promising. Nevertheless, the implementation of an international classroom or outgoing mobility is not an aim in and of itself. Instead, their purpose has to be defined in the learning outcomes and aligned with the assessment of learning outcomes. Thus it is not about choosing the most fashionable option, but about integrating learning experiences which have an impact on the students’ learning and as Aerden highlights - correspond with the internationalisation goals of a programme (Aerden 2014: 19).

5. Conclusions and final remarks

The discussion reveals that the legal framework (e.g. accreditation directive FH-AV) supports the principles of the CeQuInt label. There are no impediments for the internationalisation of programmes, nor is there an obligation to internationalise. There might be a gap between what is put in practice and the holistic approach CeQuInt aspires to. Less is known about the practice of internationalising curricula in the Austrian UAS sector and future research is needed.

The discussion of the different CeQuInt standards makes obvious that there has to be intra-organisational alignment and cooperation regarding matters of internationalisation. UAS can benefit from their rather small and more flexible structures with a manageable number of stakeholders. Therein lies the challenge in developing an organisational culture supportive of a holistic approach to internationalisation.

The outcome - oriented approach of CeQuInt can be seen as a chance to review and if necessary, establish procedures that will ultimately enhance quality as well as create more transparency. The diversity of UAS students is a valuable resource for curriculum internationalisation, complemented by the opportunities for international and intercultural learning integrated into the curriculum. However looking at their programmes, UAS will have to decide if these learning opportunities are integrated and aligned or are rather isolated activities. Tackling the CeQuInt certification means shifting the perspective from seeing internationalisation as a “luxury add-on to teaching and learning” (de Wit et al. 2015: 54), to an integrated approach where internationalisation is shaped in learning outcomes and properly aligned with the internationalisation goals of a programme, the student’s assessment and the teaching and learning activities. This shift affects the whole institution and therefore requires institutional anchoring at all levels and in all areas of the higher education institution.

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