

## Internationalisation and strategic profiling

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During my career I have addressed the phenomenon of ‘internationalisation’ in several ways. I have analysed and studied it, both as an effect of other processes like the ‘information explosion’ and globalisation, and as a source of the changing contexts of higher education systems and institutions. I have assisted in designing policies to make use of its promises, both at national and international level. And I tried to make sure that the university that I had the honour to lead could adapt to its effects. The latter task was the most challenging for me. Looking back at this task now, I would like to suggest that for any higher education institution there are at least three major conditions resulting from the internationalisation process that force these institutions to strategically analyse their positions and profiles. Let me briefly address these three conditions.

### **Mission overload**

Worldwide there is widespread expectation that universities and other institutions should research an increasingly broad range of problems in an ever-growing holistic fashion and at an accelerated pace. As our societies become more knowledgeable, universities are coming under increasing pressure to expand the production and the transfer of knowledge and to apply this knowledge to solve the problems confronting the world. The result is an accumulation of mission elements, leading to the risk of mission overload.

**as an effect of internationalisation, higher education institutions increasingly face the challenge of strategically considering their basic focus and portfolios**

### **Global research competition**

On a worldwide scale, industry is increasingly ceasing its fundamental research activities. Companies are concentrating on short-term results, while adopting a strategic global approach to more fundamental research. Companies are increasingly reliant on offshore partnerships, academic collaboration and outsourcing, thereby forming their own networks of scientific collaboration and expertise. As a result, universities are confronted with the challenge of responding to this trend and of selecting and investing in those research fields in which they can compete on a global scale. This often requires risky investments in research teams, major facilities and equipment, forcing universities to make major strategic choices regarding their research portfolios and to marshal their resources effectively and efficiently.

### **Higher education system diversity**

In the context of innovation, higher education institutions are being urged to increase participation rates and particularly the supply of well-trained ‘knowledge workers’ in prioritised sectors. Globalisation and the focus on innovation in many countries seem to be triggering governments to implement diversification policies in higher education. As a result, universities are expected to develop their education portfolios and to find their position in a diversifying higher education system.

### **Strategic challenges, the need for profiling**

Bringing these three elements together, it is clear that increasing global competitiveness strengthens the need for profiling. Strategic institutional profiling – including a conscious choice of competitors and partners – is therefore one of the most important aspects of modern higher education leadership.