Action plan for internationalisation at Karlstad University

2024-2027

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Introduction and aim

A higher education institution's mission includes being an actor on the international scene. At Karlstad University, this is expressed in one of the six strategic goals for 2030: *Our organisation demonstrates a larger degree of internationalisation.* This should enhance the quality of education and research as well as the university's administrative functions. The work should also be aligned with the Ministry of Education's goals and guidelines for internationalisation at Swedish universities.

One aim of this action plan is to articulate the strategic goals by highlighting concrete activities that promote internationalisation in various ways. However, goals, success factors, and activities related to internationalisation should be in harmony and integrated with the five other strategic goals for the university. This harmony also applies to policies and other documents that pertain to, for instance, the leadership and coworkership policy, the action plan for recruitment, and especially the university's environmental policy. In relation to this, we also wish to highlight the connection to the university's action plan for competence provision and to the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), a key process at Karlstad University in promoting the internationalisation of researchers and research.

The creation of this document was based on the experiences gained from the previous action plan. The results show that during this period, degree programmes and research groups have developed a number of promising initiatives that span exciting new partners and new forms of working, for instance in terms of internationalisation at home. Therefore, it is vital to share the positive examples and enable more staff members to benefit from the experiences of other people in the organisation.

Over the last few years, university-wide initiatives related to internationalisation have been launched. One example is Kau's involvement in Eunice - the European University for Customised Education. This consortium includes ten universities and aims to use shared resources to offer education that is tailored to suit the wider community and the needs of 150,000 students in total. Another example is the review of a possible pilot programme for non-European students. This group has previously not been a focal point, and the review will be presented alongside this action plan.

Why should we work with internationalisation?
Karlstad University needs to work actively with internationalisation for a number of reasons. A major reason is that it helps improve quality. A multicultural classroom has great potential in terms of enhancing the academic environment.
Exposure to differences in traditions, perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences nourishes the academic environment.

Internationalisation also provides our students with the chance to integrate international perspectives and experiences in their education, for instance through studies abroad or internationalisation at home. This gives our students better intercultural understanding and makes them better equipped for a globalised world.

Additionally, internationalisation opens the door to working with - and influencing - research on transnational issues such as climate change and global health crises. International work also means the chance to collaborate with universities, research institutes and industry in the global arena, which means more opportunity for networking and funding. This benefits the university's research environments and helps the university maintain high-quality research.

An international presence is also beneficial to the university's reputation and appeal and helps us attract and keep international students and international staff members with the right skills. This gives us as a university more of a competitive edge globally and enhances the national and regional skills supply.

How should we work with internationalisation?
Below is a number of starting points for internationalisation work. These include the introduction of an international council and a presentation of several key concepts or central aspects of internationalisation. These are not well suited to be concrete activities. The purpose behind them is to create a framework for how to work with internationalisation. Finally, there is an account of how internationalisation work will be a natural part of other organisational planning and monitoring.

An international council
We propose that an international council is established at Kau, consisting of the pro-vice-chancellor, an international strategist, an HR representative, and one representative each from the faculties, teacher education, and the student union. For the sake of an outside perspective from the wider community, there should be two external members.

The council will meet twice per semester and is proposed to play a pivotal role in the forward-looking international efforts. The purpose is also to facilitate a university-wide exchange of information and synchronisation in terms of focus, initiatives, and joint actions. The council should also be tasked with cultivating skills and guidance on issues such as sustainable and responsible internationalisation as well as with evaluating Kau's university-wide participation in networks. The council may also co-opt individuals if necessary, for instance from GIO and the Communications Office.

Sustainable internationalisation

This action plan and the proposed activities are based on Agenda 2030 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which aim to ensure a sustainable society for the people, the planet, and the communities. Most of the 17 sustainable development goals require international collaboration and joined global forces to be attained. This includes issues such as climate change, inequality, and poverty, as well as the challenges related to producing sustainable energy and securing sustainable consumption and production.

However, a discussion about sustainability and internationalisation requires us to consider the negative effects that travelling has on sustainable development. Travelling, which in an international context tends to involve flying, counteracts the climate goals. Every decision to travel therefore warrants careful consideration. For instance, the following should be both considered and encouraged: alternative and more climate-friendly modes of transport; the number of people travelling; digital meetings as an alternative; and whether the benefits of a trip can be maximised by planning several activities during the same period.

It is also important for the university to keep developing internationalisation at home, which means that more people can join in the internationalisation efforts without leaving the university. Activities like this include digital teaching components (for instance guest lecturers or group projects with students in other countries) or the use and dissemination of existing international features and experiences in the organisation.

It is a challenge for the university to handle the seemingly inherent paradox of increasing internationalisation without compromising on our efforts to meet the sustainable development goals.

Responsible internationalisation

International collaboration is necessary in the university's operations, but it also brings with it increased transparency, which shows the importance of being responsible in matters regarding internationalisation. The global community is complex, and we need to navigate rising geopolitical tension. Responsible internationalisation encompasses several aspects such as national interests and security, personal security, cybersecurity, academic freedom, and human rights and values, to name a few. In addition to these aspects, there are requirements for matters like responsible export control, which we have not worked with previously. That means we have to be responsive to these changes and act accordingly. For that reason, the activities in this action plan must be permeated by active awareness of these aspects. That applies on the individual level as well as the university level, supported by national guidelines.

Another aspect of increased internationalisation is a potentially larger group of international students coming to the university. Responsible internationalisation includes making sure that each student who is admitted and comes to Karlstad University has the same chance to succeed in their studies as everybody else. Therefore, responsible recruitment and preparing international students for student life is vital.

So, international cooperation and increased internationalisation bring certain challenges in addition to all their positive effects. However, we must view that in relation to the risks involved in not cooperating internationally at all.

Inclusive internationalisation

The university's internationalisation efforts should be characterised by inclusion so that everyone, regardless of personal circumstances, can join in and contribute to the activities. It's important to create inclusive environments that heed the principle of equality. Some examples of factors that can be limiting are related to disability, social circumstances, finances, culture, or language. It is a goal of Erasmus+ to enable more people with limited opportunity, or from underrepresented groups, to take part in international exchanges and collaborations. The programme offers several tools for implementing inclusive activities.

An active approach to inclusion and diversity also aligns with the UN's Agenda 2030 and one of the Sustainable Development Goals that aims to ensure and promote good education for all.

The wider community

Another of the university's six strategic goals is for the operations to be characterised by close cooperation with the wider community. It is necessary that these relations include international students, teachers, and collaborative partners. As a concrete example, the GIO and Region Värmland have established a regional EU network that includes all industry clusters, with the aim to develop the will and ability of the surrounding community to join Kau in EU projects. Attaching these groups more closely to the university's local and regional partners enriches the work done in the wider community and is also a potential contributor to the skills supply in industries facing severe difficulties in recruitment. It also helps boost the university's appeal as a place to work and study.

A natural part of operational planning

The action plan should be viewed as a tool for decisions meant to strengthen the internationalisation of education, research, and administration. It is linked to our overarching strategic goal for internationalisation via the four success factors that form the basis for the goal. The action plan has operationalised these factors in the form of several activities. We based this work on the evaluation of the previous action plan, with particular focus on free-form answers from the survey. We also studied action plans from other universities in Sweden, the Nordics and Europe. Furthermore, we considered the areas of the so-called STINT index, which is one way for the government to assess the degree of internationalisation at universities. This index consists of the degree of student mobility, the percentage of courses taught in English, and the percentage of PhD students and teachers with a foreign background.

For the sake of ensuring overview and focus, the goal has been for the action plan to contain a limited number of activities, no more than 20 in total. An important principle has been for these activities to be general in character (not number of international PhD students, agreements, and percentage of EU projects). That means that the faculties and central services have to interpret, translate, and adjust in connection to the annual operation planning with a view of integrating internationalisation into the university's operations. This is a way to signal that no one should implement every part of an action plan. What matters is that the university as a whole covers every area. Offices and departments are encouraged to use specific and measurable targets in operational planning, and there will be opportunity to compile and give feedback on activities in the regularly scheduled planning dialogues.

Prioritised activities from 2024 to 2027

Below, the four success factors that form the basis of the strategic goal for internationalisation are listed alongside a number of concrete activities for 2024 to 2027.

We recruit more employees with, and encourage, international work experience

Activities
Ensure that vacancy ads are posted internationally whenever possible.
Ensure a high percentage of international PhD students.
Work with the welcoming of international staff members.
Encourage proficiency in English and/or Swedish, or require when necessary.
Offer language support in Swedish and/or English as needed.
Increase international experience among staff members through, for example, international staff exchanges.
Ensure that all relevant documents and tools are available in English and Swedish.

We enable internationalisation at home through our courses and study programmes

Activities
Integrate international and intercultural perspectives in the educational environment, for instance international guest lecturers or digital course components with students at universities abroad.
Announce initiation funds to develop forms for, and expand, internationalisation at home.

We encourage mobility through agreements and the European University Alliance (EUNICE)

Activities
Develop existing and well-functioning collaborations and partnerships to promote quality and continuity.
Expand the range of courses taught in English.
Increase the distribution of information about exchange opportunities (in various forms) for students.
Actively capture the experiences of students who travel abroad, for distribution and inspiration.
Actively utilise opportunities related to EUNICE.
Create mobility windows in degree programmes.

We establish more international research projects

Activities
Actively work with international networks to develop research projects with the aim of enhancing environments and increasing international visibility.
Increase the number of research projects, for instance within Horizon Europe.
Announce initiation funds at the faculty level for international research collaboration.
Encourage as many people as possible to have international connections.

Monitoring the action plan

Continuous monitoring of the action plan and its activities will take place in planning dialogues. In the autumn of 2027, a more detailed evaluation of the results and experiences of the activities will take place.