

Internationalisation Strategy Heidelberg University of Education 2026

Outline:

1. Preamble

Principles

2. Initial position

- 2.1 Strengths
- 2.2 Challenges

3. Mission

4. Vision

5. Strategy

- 5.1 Areas
- 5.2 Topics
- 5.3 Fields of action
- 5.4 Indicators
- 5.5 Responsible persons und institutions
- 5.6 Evaluation

6. Goals and measures

1. Preamble

The Heidelberg University of Education is an educational university with a university profile and 4,600 students. The academic staff comprises approximately 300 people. The core tasks are the formation of professional and managerial staff for educational professions, the qualification of doctoral and post-doctoral students, subject-specific and subject-didactic research as well as research in the areas of educational science and special education. The university's distinctive profile is based on classroom research and school development, diversity and inclusion, STEM and media education as well as communication and linguistic-literary education. Professional further education programmes for teachers as well as professional and managerial staff, attractive cooperations in research and education along with close networking with institutions in the Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region complement the profile of the Heidelberg University of Education. Numerous exhibitions, concerts, readings and theatre performances enrich the university culturally.

International cooperation in research and education in addition to access to international experience for all members of the Heidelberg University of Education were agreed upon as early as 2011, when the university first adopted an internationalisation strategy. Ten years later and under the impression of the rapid changes in our globally interconnected world as well as the challenges posed by the major topics of digitization, sustainability, responsibility for society and inclusion, this strategy needs to be further developed and given new emphasis. Opportunities and potentials in the area of digitization are to be further developed and used for the benefit of the university in a critically reflected manner.

Principles:

The Heidelberg University of Education is committed to the values of democracy with its implications for education as well as respect for academic, ethical and legal standards. International cooperation is characterised by mutual respect, interaction at eye level and a partnership-based approach. The Heidelberg University of Education considers global sustainable development to be a key factor in shaping economic progress in harmony with social justice and within the limits of the ecological resilience of Earth's system.

In regard to its internationalisation, the university particularly adheres and commits to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* of the United Nations and its therein formulated *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).

The university sees education as key to achieving these goals as being substantive to its understanding of internationality and internationalisation. Education for sustainable development in teaching, research and transfer is thus regarded by the university as a guiding principle that is already being implemented through activities in various subjects and institutions and is also increasingly being considered in internationalisation.

The university's fields of action are global and world-spanning. Particular importance is attached to European networking through the ERASMUS+ programme with its diverse funding instruments.

For many years, the university has been cooperating with institutions and actors in less developed regions of the world. Thus, from the very beginning the idea of development cooperation as a form of cooperation in which institutions and actors involved act in partnership with each other and benefit from each other has been lived. This dialogical approach has made and continues to make a significant contribution to the successful internationalisation of the university.

Equal opportunity and participation are basic principles and profile features of the university. For this reason, the goal of enabling all members of the university to actively participate in international discourse in research, education and administration as well as gaining valuable experience in international exchange has been set. In this regard, the university can rely on its pioneering role, for example with the *Annelie Wellensiek Zentrum für inklusive Bildung (Annelie Wellensiek Center for Inclusive Education)* and its innovative efforts in the field of inclusion. Equal opportunities and inclusion are among the world's challenges and are thus part of the university's internationalisation strategy, which is geared toward sustainability.

The university and its actors foster a pronounced welcoming culture toward their international visitors, which will be continued and also expanded while taking new formats, like digital communication, into account.

Internal and external, and thus international, networking of the university and its actors is believed to be a key element for the implementation of internationalisation measures and for achieving goals. Networking activities in particular provide important impulse for new formats in research, teaching and studies.

The university appreciates and recognises the measures of internationalisation comprehensively. This applies in particular to the great commitment of the internationally active students, teachers, researchers and staff.

2. Initial Position

Strengths:

The Heidelberg University of Education has many years of valuable experience in international context and participation in international discourse. Based on its internationally active members, the university has proven intercultural competence and a high level of experience and expertise in development cooperation.

Stable and sustainable international partnerships with more than fifty institutions worldwide are maintained. The university regularly evaluates the quality and output of its university collaborations, adapts them to current situations, and expands its portfolio with new

collaborations. Researchers and teachers also maintain numerous bilateral affiliations and share their expertise in international professional discourses at international conferences and congresses as well as in a large number of publications. These cooperations, which are initially informal and not institutionalised, often lead to joint projects and applications for external funding. Successful external funding and scholarship programmes, in addition to the financial resources provided by the university, make important contributions to the funding of international collaborations. In this area, the university is successful to an increasing degree. In 2020 alone, international projects and scholarship programmes generated EUR 0.5 million for internationalisation. The ERASMUS+ programme, various German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) programmes and the Baden-Württemberg STIPENDIUM (Baden-Wuerttemberg Scholarship) not only support the university financially, but also contribute to its focus on education and research. The ERASMUS+ programme is of particular importance due to its long-term focus and sustainability as well as its various efforts. Based on the continuing international exchange, the quality and perspectives of education, research and teaching at the educational science-oriented university are substantially strengthened.

The overall responsibility for the internationalisation of the Heidelberg University of Education is carried by the respective member of the university administration appointed in this area. With the International Office and its associated *Center for International Teacher Education (CITE)*, the university maintains a central institution that implements, enhances and develops internationalisation. The academic advisory board of the *CITE* and the internationalisation representatives of the faculties perform essential functions regarding process support and internal university communication. Research, teaching and studies as well as administration are increasingly aligned internationally. Experience and insights gained from several years of process support by the *German Rectors' Conference (HRK)* as part of an audit and re-audit process regarding internationalisation are integrated into the strategic further development of internationalisation.

The university's key strength derives from its intensive internal networking of institutions, scientific centres and actors. As an example, *CITE* is a member of the *Heidelberger Zentrum Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung (BNE-Zentrum) (Heidelberg Centre for Education for Sustainable Development)*. Furthermore, the university is interconnected on an international level. It participates in the European and international higher education fairs of the *European Association for International Education (EAIE)* and the *NAFSA: Association of International Educators*.

It has been a member of the *Association of Universities (IAU)* since 2021 and is part of the newly established *UNESCO UNITWIN network "Education for Sustainable Development and Societal Transformations"*. The latter was co-initiated and is supported on behalf of the university by the *UNESCO Chair on "Observation and Education of World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve"*, which was established in the Faculty of Geography in 2016. Scientists at the university are active in a wide range of international professional networks, some of which involve leadership roles.

Challenges:

Both internationality and internationalisation are rooted in many areas of the university and are actively practiced by many actors. This is evident in exchange programmes, research cooperations, the increase in internationally oriented third-party funded projects and the range of courses offered. However, the number of people who benefit from the opportunities of international mobility continues to be low. At the university, a culture in which international exchange is part of everyday university life is not yet practiced in enough areas and mobility, be it in physical, digital or hybrid form, is also not considered a given.

The task remains to establish an international university culture in all areas and within the university's breadth. Furthermore, it is essential to promote internationalisation as a necessity to actively shape our world along with the solution of global challenges and to encourage the members of the university to actively participate in the process. It remains a challenge to articulate the added value of internationalisation efforts and the associated professional and personal gains within the university community. It needs to be tangible for the development of the university and its responsible education sector as well as for its individual members.

If internationalisation measures are to contribute to the university's success nationally as well as internationally, comprehensive recognition is needed at the university. Otherwise, they may be perceived as an individual experience, but they can neither unfold their potential for the university nor make it effective.

The expansion of networks between the university's units and actors involved in internationalisation can lead to considerable synergy effects in the coming years. The ERASMUS+ programme generation 2021-2027 provides substantial impetus for this by naming specific fields of action (civic engagement, environment-friendly behaviour, equal opportunities regarding access to education as well as digitalization).

Internationality and internationalisation measures must be implemented with sustainability in mind. One particular challenge is physical mobility, whose specific structure must be aligned with its objectives and desired impact.

The range of tasks related to internationalisation is growing steadily. However, the resources required for implementation are limited. For example, the implementation of the digitization project *Erasmus without Paper "EWP"* within the new ERASMUS programme will be an overwhelming challenge and numerous of the university's departments will be involved. Without the availability of additional resources, it will not be possible to achieve this goal. The challenge is to find a way to balance the conflicting requirements.

3. Mission:

As a result of current developments, the Heidelberg University of Education sees its conviction confirmed regarding the international orientation of the education and science system as a prerequisite for contribution to the solution of global challenges.

An equally clear stance on the importance of international exchange and cooperation in education, science and research can also be found in the strategy paper on internationalisation of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF): "The need to cooperate worldwide in education, science and research in order to meet global challenges is undisputed." (BMBF, Reprint 2019, p. 20). The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), as one of the most important partners of German universities, also emphasises in its 2025 Strategy: "The internationalisation of science is part of a larger global political context, it helps to shape, but also to determine its development." (DAAD, Strategy 2025).

By participating in international dialogue, the Heidelberg University of Education can contribute its own knowledge and experience as well as benefit from its partners in the exchange.

Increasing digitization, growing complexity and the need for sustainability possess a global dimension and require the timely further development of international cooperation (*mutatis mutandis* BMBF *Reprint 2019, p. 4*). Social responsibility for society beyond research and education is also increasingly being addressed in higher education. This "Third Mission" must be taken into account in relation to internationalisation ("Third Mission", DAAD, Rühland 2020; European Renewal Agenda 2017, ERASMUS Generation 2021-2028). For the Heidelberg University of Education, this reference is evident in its core profile focus on research and education in international processes. International experience holds the key to innovative solutions (DAAD Strategy 2025) and is highly relevant in regard to the challenges of a heterogeneous and diverse society and its educational institutions, since it provides the opportunity to break down limitations of thought caused by persistence in familiar contexts of dialogue and research. In accordance with its profile, the University of Education would like to make a substantial contribution to this goal.

Innovations in education can also achieve important impulses through international dialogue. The Heidelberg University of Education consequently regards international networking, cooperation and exchange as fundamental to the fulfillment of its tasks and its own further development and profiling as an educationally oriented university.

Digital transformation offers new perspectives and opportunities for international exchange. In this area, the university already benefits from experience, knowledge and methods gained from formats like online studies, digitally conducted guest professorships and accompanying measures of international cooperation. In the future, internationalisation will be enriched and advanced by innovative digital and hybrid formats for education and studies, as well as communication and exchange in other areas of

higher education. It enables people who are not able or do not want to be physically mobile to have access to international experience and thus makes a valuable contribution to participation in international discourse and equal opportunities.

However, digital formats cannot replace the experience of physically exploring and experiencing other cultures. For this reason, the university considers physical mobility to be essential in order to achieve successful internationalisation and ascribes outstanding importance to it.

4. Vision:

In the coming years, the Heidelberg University of Education will continue to evolve into an international meeting place in an even more visible and interconnected way than hitherto. Thus, it will fulfill its task to contribute to the solution of global challenges. It assumes social responsibility for society beyond research and education in higher education, which it implements as its "Third Mission". Equal opportunities, participation, the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda are implemented and achieved in international contexts. Responsible actors, participating institutions and work units of the university cooperate even more intensively than before.

Internationalisation is anchored in all areas of the university and, to this end, the entire university is involved in the process of internationalisation. The university is developing a culture in which internationality is a natural part of the university's everyday life and is lived by its members. The international profile of the university's members is noticeably increased. Areas of competence such as tolerance of ambiguity, role distance and the ability to empathise and reflect are becoming even more prominent profile characteristics of its members than before and are considered important for successful interactions. For this purpose, international experience is made available to all members of the university.

The university thus becomes a place of international scientific exchange and international cooperation, in which all partners benefit from each other based on the idea of reciprocity, develop global know-how as well as internationally and interculturally effective competence. The Heidelberg University of Education sees itself as part of a global community network, receptive to intercultural dialogue.

Innovative formats and digital transformation make a significant contribution to participation in international discourse and to equal opportunities. The university is significantly expanding these formats based on its digitization strategy. Internationalisation and digitization are addressed in an interconnected discourse. The responsible actors of the university's participating units cooperate closely. The university welcomes the impetus for innovation from the European Commission in the ERASMUS programme 2021-2027 and implements the requirements of the European Commission on digitization, including the *Erasmus without Paper "EWP"* project.

Internationality is designed to be long-lasting: Cooperations are characterised by stability and designed for long-term perspectives. The university also intensifies its international networking in a productive and sustainable manner and also uses digital formats for this purpose.

Internationalisation abroad, at home and at a distance are three important and viable pillars of internationalisation, which can also be interrelated and achieve synergy effects.

Physical mobility continues to be a key factor of internationalisation. The number of people who are internationally mobile will be increased significantly. Physical mobility is also absolutely essential for the establishment of new cooperations, partnerships and networks.

For the implementation of its internationalisation goals, the university provides resources in an appropriate manner.

5. Strategy:

Internationalisation is a complex and multifactorial process that is not carried out synchronously (Schön, 2019). It therefore requires continuous adaptation to changing framework conditions. Internationalisation has many facets and areas of activity. The *Internationalisation Strategy 2026* takes this into account by defining the mission and vision of the university and by specifying areas, topics, fields of action and indicators of internationalisation. The process of internationalisation is supported by the advisory board of the *Center for International Teacher Education (CITE)*, whose members include the internationalisation representatives of the faculties.

5.1. Areas

- Study (gaining and reflecting on experience)
- Research and education (expanding the university's international connectivity, further developing project competence, promoting young scientists)
- Continuing education and transfer (promoting international scientific exchange)
- Administration (further development of structures and processes)

Internationalisation affects the entire university. Study, research and education, further education and transfer are related to one another and mutually enrich each other. The university is carried by the administration in its entirety. Therefore, the internationalisation strategy is directed at the entire university and all represented areas and status groups.

5.2. Topics

- Education for sustainable development and sustainability (*Sustainable Development Goals*)
- Participation (heterogeneity and inclusion)
- Social responsibility
- Digitization as an opportunity for internationalisation

Education for sustainable development, participation, social responsibility, and digitization are currently the most important areas in higher education within the framework of the United Nations' seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and they are part of everyday life at the Heidelberg University of Education in terms of education, research and the commitment of its members, both across and outside the university. Since these areas hold great potential for the development and profiling of the university as a whole as well as for its individual members, these topics should be at the centre of the internationalisation strategy.

5.3. Fields of action

- Internationalisation abroad
- Internationalisation at home
- Internatioalization at a distance

Substantial international and intercultural experience will continue to be acquired primarily through periods spent abroad (*Internationalisation abroad*). However, not all university members neither have the intention nor the ability to realise a physical experience abroad. For this reason, internationalisation measures at the university in the areas of research, education, further education and transfer, as well as administration at the Heidelberg campus (*Internationalisation at home*) are being added in addition to physical mobility. Digitization also creates great opportunities to complement and enrich international exchange with the help of innovative formats (*Internationalisation at a distance*).

5.4. Indicators

- Number of international students
- Number of international doctoral students
- Number of international staff
- Number of mobile persons, in particular in the ERASMUS+ programme, as well as success in the mobility of teachers, students, researchers, young scientists and non-scientific staff.
- Number as well as quality and sustainability of university partnerships
- Number and scope of international research projects (quantity/scope/external funding, quality/output)
- Number and scope of international research contacts (number/quality/output)
- Number of scientific publications with international relevance
- Number of people engaged in international expert associations
- Number as well as success of doctorate procedures in international cooperation
- Number of persons acting as reviewers in international doctoral procedures etc.
- Number of foreign-language courses, English-language courses in particular
- Number of courses with a focus on internationality
- Number of courses with focus on development cooperation
- Follow-up activities to the university's internal Teaching Fellowship programme in terms of its sustainability (digital/hybrid formats) and increase in numbers

- Internationally oriented degree programmes (English-language, double degrees)
- Study abroad opportunities in degree programmes
- Compulsory module "International and intercultural competence" in all teaching-related degree programmes
- Number of curricularly recognised ECTS earned abroad during the course of study

These indicators focus on the specific profile of the Heidelberg University of Education. Given its orientation as a university of education, the focus of studies, research and education as well as further education lies on the training of future teachers. Therefore, common standard indicators for measuring the internationality of universities, such as the number of international academic staff, can be less applied simply due to structural constraints. Nevertheless, the university explicitly strives to increase the number of persons with an international profile.

5.5. Responsible persons and institutions

- The rectorate member responsible for internationalisation issues
- Internationalisation representatives of the faculties acting as dialogue partners with the faculties
- International Office (implementation of mobility programmes) and *Center for International Teacher Education / CITE* (strategic development and implementation of internationalisation)
- Scientific Advisory Board of the *CITE* (consultation and initiation of internationalisation measures)
- Faculties and subjects (decisive localisation of internationalisation measures)
- Centre for Practical School Studies (ZfS)
- Chancellor as head of administration

5.6. Evaluation

- Education and studies: Quality Management Office of the Heidelberg University of Education (SQM)
- Overall evaluation, e.g. after 5 years, possibly including external expertise, for example EVALAG

6. Goals and measures

- Increase in the number of international students
- Increase in the number of international doctoral students
- Increase in the number of international personnel
- Increase in the number of mobile persons, especially in the ERASMUS+ programme as well as increase in the success of the mobility of teachers, students, researchers, young scientists and non-scientific staff
- Increase in the number, quality and sustainability of university partnerships

- Increase in the number and scope of international research projects (quantity/scope/external funding, quality/output)
 - Increase in the number and scope of international research contacts (quantity/quality/output)
 - Increase in the number of scientific publications with international relevance and improvement of their findability, e.g. in internal databases
 - Increase in the number of persons who are active in international expert associations
 - Increase in the number and success of doctoral procedures in international cooperation
 - Increase in the number of persons who are active as reviewers in international doctoral procedures, etc.
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- Increase in the number of foreign-language courses, English-language courses in particular
 - Increase in the number of courses with a focus on internationality
 - Increase in the number of courses with a focus on development cooperation
 - Expansion of the university's internal Teaching Fellowship programme in regard to its sustainability: creation of follow-up activities (digital/hybrid formats)
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- Establishment of internationally oriented degree programmes (English-language, double degrees)
 - Establishment of study abroad opportunities in degree programmes
 - Establishment of the compulsory module "International and intercultural competence" in all teaching-related degree programmes
 - Increase of the number of curricularly recognised ECTS earned abroad during the course of study

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