



GINTL INSIGHTS ON Higher Education Internationalisation in Educational Sciences and Related fields – Experiences from Finland

- Many different expectations for internationalisation exist within and outside HEIs.
- Not all expectations are a good fit for the HEI core duties.
- We recommend continuous dialogue to clarify roles, interests and limitations.

Multiple Expectations

The internationalisation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in educational sciences, teacher education, and related fields is driven by several different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations. The expectations observed in GINTL work included:

Finnish government & HEI management

- Financial sustainability of HEIs (joint study programmes, fees, top research and talent).
- Boost for Finland's educational export industry (visibility, references, networks, deals).
- Finnish contribution to global challenges ("develop solutions to global education crisis").

Academic staff in Finnish HEIs

- Connecting diverse realities.
- Building ethical partnerships with mutual exchanges and benefits.
- Joint research and projects (mainly in partner countries) and access to research funding.
- Opportunities for "doing good", traveling, interaction, personal and professional growth.
- Opportunities for students.
- Globally minded students and staff.

Partners in India / China / Africa

As previous, with additions:

- Funding for research and impactful interventions in own country.

These insights are based on the participatory Lessons Learnt process organised for higher education practitioners active in the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning (GINTL). GINTL was a 2021–2024 pilot network of 20 Finnish higher education institutions and their partners in India, China, and the African continent.

The document was compiled in November 2024 by GINTL coordination teams at University of Helsinki and University of Jyväskylä.



- Opportunities for schoolteachers, officials and researchers to visit Finnish schools.
- Opportunities to share own research and expertise with education stakeholders in Finland.
- Sourcing experts from Finnish HEIs to advise in educational reforms and to build capacity at school level.

Expectations vs. HEI Duties

For sustainability, internationalisation activities should align with HEI's core duties: research, education, and societal impact. There's been little discussion on how international these duties should be.

Apart from the now-ending massive investment in GINTL and other global network pilots, the government's funding model for HEIs offers limited incentives for international collaborations, except those leading to publications, attracting fee-paying international students, or securing external funding.

Individual HEIs may prioritise internationalisation for funding, but many domestic issues compete for these resources. Even when internationalisation is prioritised, relevant fields for global education development may still be overlooked.

Barriers

Several barriers limit Finnish HEIs' ability to meet external expectations in global education development:

- The foremost responsibility of HEIs is to the students in their degree programmes.
- Staff time is tied up in teaching and research, with most work plans set for the full academic year at a time.
- International capacity building projects often mean less time for publishing, crucial for academic careers.
- Most external funding requires self-funding, typically as a coordinator's working time, which is hard to secure during austerity.
- Requests from state organisations in partner countries often focus on (school) visits, short courses, or tailored content, which are costly and don't contribute to HEIs'

core duties, falling instead under education export companies.

- Compared with many other academic fields in Finland, educational sciences and teacher training face relatively greater challenges in terms of internationalisation (see GINTL Insights on global education crises and international students).

For Consideration

Finnish HEIs and their partners

- It is important for all parties to clarify their possible roles and understand each other's contexts. For example, what domestic constraints limit their actions and capabilities? What benefits them, and what does not? What is the scale and type of resources they command or have access to? What is already being done by other actors?
- As higher education institutions, our role differs from that of development organisations such as NGOs or the UN. Our collaborations should leverage our strengths, focusing on enhancing our capabilities in research and education for the best of education in our societies.

Finnish Government

- See the last point above – the most fruitful international role for HEIs is in collaboration with peers in partner countries. If the government wishes for HEIs to engage in education development or export support that does not directly benefit their core duties, it is essential to provide additional resources to cover the costs.
- HEI engagement in global education development cannot be driven by the agenda of “creating solutions”. Educational sciences research requires a much deeper contextual understanding than research in many other fields (see the GINTL Insight on educational crises).
- In the global South, educational sciences and teacher training often struggle to access domestic funding. HEI collaborations therefore play an important role in this area.
- Include a research component in government-funded capacity development projects.

EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

In most discussions, GINTL has been placed in the realm of *global education development*. We would like to propose that the most appropriate understanding of the term sees the Finnish education system needing as much continuous development as any other system in the world. International collaborations are therefore an important opportunity for Finnish actors to develop the Finnish system and educational practices in Finland.

OPEN QUESTIONS

FIT FOR THE FUTURE?

How can Finland ensure that internationalisation in educational sciences continuously evolves with the times, remains relevant to society, and aligns with the core duties of HEIs? We believe that continued dialogue between the government and HEI stakeholders with expertise in educational sciences and teacher education should be part of the answer.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO WHO?

When we as Finnish HEIs engage in multi-stakeholder projects abroad, is it ok for us to bypass the HEIs in the country of collaboration? E.g. only collaborate with a local civil society organisation or a government entity, without contacting local HEIs to inquire about their interest in the collaboration?

FURTHER READING

[Funding model of Finnish HEIs](#)

Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024. (In Finnish)

Hans, de W. (2024). [‘Everything That Quacks is Internationalization’ - Critical Reflections on the Evolution of Higher Education Internationalization](#). Journal of Studies in International Education, 28(1), 3-14

Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö (2020.) [Yhteistyössä maailman parasta Korkeakoulutuksen ja tutkimuksen kansainvälisyyden edistämisen linjausten 2017–2025 seuranta ja kehittäminen](#).

Reinikka, R., Niemi, H., Tulivuori, J., (2018). [Stepping Up Finland's Global Role in Education](#). Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland/Niras.