

Session: How we transformed IRO to improve student experience?

Aim of session: The session presents how the introduction of changes in the management of the office, division of work and mindset, impact the quality of student experience.

Material needed: computer and beamer

Time of session: 1,5 hour

Description of session: The organization of daily work and the division of responsibilities in key to the smooth functioning of every office. In case of international students, the International Relations Office or other unit of similar function is usually the first one that students contact and the one that supervises the course of their studies. The work environment in such unit is interesting but also intense and very often challenging. The session should look first at the institutional structure of the office or department that deals with international affairs and explain the ground rules of its functioning and the reason behind it. The changes that the structure underwent should be explained and what caused them, as well as any failures of the process. The International Offices in various universities not always have matching functions and the areas of responsibilities are usually shared with faculties and other units. During the session the organisation of these tasks related to broadly understood international cooperation should be discussed, relating to for instance:

- Cooperation with other units and organisations
- Organisation of student admission service, both degree and exchange
- Coordination of bilateral agreements
- Coordinating of exchange programmes, as well as educational projects
- Organisation of visits of international guests
- Reporting internally, as well as to external (funding) bodies, such as the Ministry, National Agency, European Commission
- Preparation of an annual report on university's international cooperation
- Preparation of data for the purpose of international rankings
- International promotion of the university
- Organisation of the international student service

The following characteristics of work in an International Office should be tackled when it comes to staff employed:

- development of openness to new task
- quick adaptation to new challenges
- never-ending learning
- support to the ones employed in international relations
- refocusing the priorities from office service to student service
- efficient, friendly and high quality service (quick responses)
- clear and understandable communication with students – preventing misunderstandings and tackling additional questions

- close cooperation between IRO staff members
- integration of international and local students
- good and friendly cooperation with other units at the university
- impartiality in difficult matters/problems
- adjusting documents or announcements to the needs of all students (i.e. translations)
- preparation for arrival – both of UL staff and students
- sharing tasks during intense and busy periods; supporting one another
- keeping each other updated and informed

The session should also present the changes that resulted from the transformation of the work in the International Relations Office, for instance:

- How have the changes influenced the numbers of international students?
- How has the quality of service improved and how was it measured?

Other changes that impact the student experience and the way they are managed within the office:

- How can the website and its content impacts the student experience?
- Presentation of the following issues of the guide for international students and the alterations in different editions? (how often, why, what worked what didn't).
- The evolution of the promotional material (forms, languages, design, distribution).
- Management of social media (which ones, how, when, how often, etc.)
- Photo sessions, videos, integration events, contests and other initiatives that help to build the community.

The session should also provide the feedback of students that comment on their experience when it comes to their relations with the staff of the International Office, participation in events organised by the office, users of the promotional material, etc. and how they were impacted.

- How are the students involved in the decision-making process?
- How do their opinion regarding the functioning of the office and the activities organised by the office is collected?
- Does it help do anticipate their needs and questions they might have?

It is also important to discuss the feedback regarding the work done in the International Relations Office for part of other stakeholders, for instance: university authorities, other higher education institutions, the relevant Ministry, international organisations, media, university community in general. Any success stories worth sharing? Any problems that could have been anticipated?

Other notes: The session should also point out the values that the university community stand upon and how these values are reflected in the everyday work and in the initiatives and projects run in the International Relations Office.