

# International Advisory Councils: A New Aspect of Internationalization

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The latest accoutrement of world-class universities, or those aspiring to world-class status, is an international advisory council (IAC). Heidelberg University, in Germany, has one headed by a former Oxford vice chancellor; the Higher School of Economics committee, in Moscow, is chaired by a Nobel Prize-winning American economist; and several prominent Saudi Arabian universities have committees composed of top-ranking academics and a few business executives. The launch of national excellence initiatives in various parts of the world—China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, Spain, and South Korea, to mention only a few—has often been associated with the creation of such advisory boards at the institutional level. Indeed, some countries have mandated that the universities benefiting from added funds appoint such councils.

We define international advisory councils as advisory bodies formed primarily or exclusively by international members, external to the institutions, serving the upper levels of the administration and governance.

Globalization has created an environment where international expertise and linkages have become *de rigueur* for universities aspiring to world-class status. The idea is that universities must pursue the highest standards of research and, in some cases, teaching, and that international experience and expertise are very helpful to achieve these goals. IACs are seen as a way of obtaining relevant global knowledge about how to best organize and build top research-intensive universities. An IAC shows that the university has a cosmopolitan outlook, that it receives advice from top university leaders and scholars from world-class institutions, and that it can “benchmark” itself with the best international practices. Some feel that they need an IAC because their peer universities have them. Most want to take advantage of the prestige of the IAC members, and hope that those members will be informal ambassadors for their universi-

ties internationally.

## IACS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW THEY WORK

Research we recently conducted sheds light on international advisory councils. IACs can be seen as a contribution to the internationalization of academic governance, although in no case do councils have actually decision-making roles. Our research found most IACs with a membership between six and fourteen members. In order of frequency, IAC members are current or former high-level administrators (usually presidents, rectors, or vice-chancellors), higher education researchers or scholars in areas relevant to the university appointing them, individuals with a policy background, or industry representatives. The IAC landscape seems to be heavily dominated by men, from Western countries, and in general affiliated to prestigious institutions. Both open and fixed terms are prevalent among IACs. Some IAC members have had some relationship with the university before they are appointed—through social networks, having spoken at the institution, or other contacts.

Members agree to join IACs out of a sense of service and a desire to be helpful. They are sometimes attracted by the specific institution and their relationship to it, the country in which the university is located, or a specific field of specialization that interests them. Relating to their participation, members identified several themes they found valuable: learning opportunities, academic service, the chance to influence policy, and the relationships with other members of the council and colleagues at the university—among others.

Most IACs meet once or twice a year, sometimes with additional virtual meetings. Meetings usually are from one to three days in length—although at least one council meets for a week and asks members to give lectures on campus. Some councils pay members an honorarium, but most seem not to, paying only all travel expenses of council members.

Meetings typically include the senior leadership group of the sponsoring university working with the IAC members. In some cases, additional faculty and sometimes students are invited to participate. Meetings are generally chaired by the university president, sometimes in collaboration with the IAC chair. Topics include reports on the progress of the university and questions about which the university leadership team would like consult the IAC.

## WHAT THEY DO

As perceived by both IAC members and university sponsors, the main function of IACs is to provide external advice on the design and implementation of the university’s overall strategy. Sometimes, the IAC provides additional services, such as interpreting university initiatives to exter-

nal constituencies or even to university faculty or others on campus. Everyone participating in our research project emphasized the key role of IACs in providing a global perspective and a sense of best practice from respected academic leaders and distinguished scholars. IAC members are much more than consultants—they are senior colleagues who have some inside knowledge of the university, and a commitment to its goals, values, and plans.

There was widespread agreement among the study participants that IACs are effective—if they are well organized, have clearly targeted agenda, and are taken seriously by the academic community—and if the university follows advice from the IAC.

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of our research, we suggest that tertiary education institutions interested in establishing effective international advisory councils consider the following key questions in order to benefit fully from such an initiative:

- Do you value lessons from international experience to inform strategic decisions about the future of your university?
- What is your actual purpose in setting up an IAC? Have you defined the actual goals that you seek to achieve by establishing an IAC and working with its members?
- Does the composition of the proposed IAC reflect a healthy diversity in terms of voices and experience (gender, academic profile and disciplines, geographic distribution, balance between practitioners and researchers, etc.)?
- Do the IAC members have a clear notion of the specific inputs that are expected from them?
- What are the learning and decision-making objectives of each IAC meeting from the viewpoint of your institution? Is the meeting agenda sufficiently focused to achieve these objectives?
- Are you willing/able to objectively share the challenges that your institution faces and listen to constructive guidance with an open mind?
- Do you have a mechanism to ensure systematic follow-up after IAC deliberations and monitor the results of

these actions on a regular basis?

- Do you have clear rules to replace IAC members and bring new ones on board in line with your evolving agenda?
- In what ways are you able to obtain useful contributions from IAC members, beyond their inputs during the regular meetings, when you seek additional advice on key decisions that your university needs to consider?
- Are you able to efficiently organize IAC meetings, providing sufficient advance notice to members, and help with logistics?

Finally, while IACs have so far been mainly limited to universities interested in strengthening their international profile and level of peer recognition, there is no reason why other types of tertiary education institutions could not benefit from IACs in their search for excellence in the areas that correspond to their specific mission and characteristics. Indeed, the institutions on which this article is based are all research-intensive universities—but other kinds of tertiary education institutions can draw the same benefits from the expertise and international perspectives of an IAC. ■

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## Internationalization of the Curriculum in Israeli Colleges

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The foundations for the higher education system in Israel were laid in the mid-1920s during the period of the British mandate, and until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, there were only two academic institutions (the Technion and the Hebrew University). The rest of the universities were established by the mid-1970s. An important legislative change in the 1990s enabled the opening of academic colleges (general, technical, and professional), a milestone which marked the transition to a conceptually new academic landscape.

Today, Israel is home to a total of 63 higher education institutions: seven research universities, one Open University and 55 colleges. At the opening of the present academic year, 306,370 students were expected to enroll in all academic institutions for bachelor's, master's, PhD, and diploma training. Out 190,400 bachelor's students (excluding those enrolled at the Open University), 66 percent enrolled