

# A Comprehensive Structure to Understand Outward Mobility

Reflections for University International Offices

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This article aims to review a number of previous reports and studies of the impact of international outward mobility on university, staff and students. It also reflects on the lack of practical measurement of the overall impact of outward mobility on university, staff and students. Overall, it is believed that outward mobility enhances internationalisation at the university; it increases the international research activities for staff, and the employability skills of mobile students. A comprehensive structure to understand outward mobility is suggested at the end of the article. Further investigation is required to test the viability of the suggested structure. Conclusions and recommendations for senior management professionals and international and partnership practitioners are presented.

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## 1. Introduction

Internationalisation at universities is crucial nowadays. Internationalising a university would improve student preparedness, internationalise the curriculum, enhance the international profile of the institution, strengthen research and knowledge production, and diversify its faculty and staff (Marmolejo, 2012). Different indicators that measure internationalisation have been suggested by practitioners in the field (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007; de Wit, 2011). Study abroad and outward mobility are among the key indicators of the level of internationalisation.

### Definition and types of outward mobility

Outward mobility is a term used by university international officers to refer to the mobility spent by a student, staff or administrator in another institution or university other than its home university. The duration of the mobility could last from few days to more than one semester. Considering the benefits of outward mobility, many universities are encouraging their members to participate in it. Different funding resources are allocated for this action, when the most popular one is the mobility programme funded by the European Commission, Erasmus+, and International Credit Mobility. The impact of outward mobility is still not obvious to several university stakeholders. For example, in the UK, although there has been a steady rise in the number of UK domiciled students taking up an outward mobility opportunity, increasing by 32.95% between 2007–08 and 2011–12 (Carbonell, 2013), the UK is still poorly placed in terms of the number of students who are mobile relative to its European and other international counterparts. Outward mobility is thought to be influencing university internationalisation, staff development, student career opportunities and employability. However, despite the fact that many studies and reports highlight the impact of outward mobility on university, staff and students, very few studies have employed systematic comprehensive methodological designs adequate for documenting the value added by studying abroad comparing with those that might be achieved in domestic or traditional campus-based courses (Terrant et al., 2014; Williams, 2005).

### Aim of the article

It is supposed that understanding the impact of outward mobility would not be accomplished without understanding the other aspects of outward mobility, e.g. the motivations, challenges and processes of it. This article aims to review previous studies and reports on the impact of outward mobility on university, staff and students and the tools used in measuring this impact. The article also reflects on the lack of comprehensive practical measurement of the impact of outward mobility on university, staff and students. For future consideration by senior international management and international and partnerships offices, a comprehensive structure to understand the impact of outward mobility is suggested at the end of the article.

In the first part, the paper presents the impact of study abroad and outward mobility on the internationalisation of the university and on

academic staff development. In the second part, the paper explains more specifically the effect of outward mobility on students' employability and career development. The third part develops a comprehensive structure for measuring the impact of outward mobility. A timeframe and tools for measurement of outward mobility are also suggested.

## 2. Impact of Study Abroad and Outward Mobility on Staff and Institutions

Very few studies and reports have investigated the impact of study abroad and outward mobility on staff and on the whole university, where, most of these studies focussed on the positive impact of study abroad and outward mobility on the university and the staff (Svetlik & Lalić, 2016; Standley, 2015; Bridger, 2015; Veugelers & Van Bouwel, 2015; Brandenburg, Berghoff, & Taboadela, 2014; Marmolejo, 2012; Sweeney, 2012).

On the staff level, outward mobility has an impact on academic staff development in universities. Research carried out on a sample of 406 academic staff from three Slovenian public universities shows that academic staff value their involvement in international activities positively and consider that international mobility contributes significantly to their professional development. Moreover, this could be interpreted as a positive impact of the internationalisation of higher education on the quality of higher education institutions (Svetlik & Lalić, 2016). Using econometric analysis on survey data from European-born and European-educated researchers who are internationally mobile within Europe or the United States, Veugelers and Bouwel (2015) found significant positive effects from international mobility on scientific productivity, as well as several other positive career development effects. European researchers who are mobile to the United States consistently report stronger positive impact on scientific productivity and on their career development compared to their peers who are mobile within the EU (Veugelers & Bouwel, 2015). In investigating the aspects of international mobility on teaching practice in a typical higher education institution, Standley (2015) highlights multiple interdependent drivers related to staff international exposure and cooperation in research and graduate employability. The potential benefit to staff as a result of outward student mobility is clearly articulated by Sweeney in the publication/report *Going Mobile* (2012) and Brandenburg et al. in the *Erasmus Impact Study* (2014). Both highlight the opportunity to develop international relationships through negotiations with new mobility partners, ensuring the quality of the student experience on placement and fresh opportunities to build partnerships for scholarly activity.

**Studies on outward mobility on staff level**

**Studies on outward mobility on university level**

On the university level, outward mobility has some benefits for non-mobile students, relating to increased intercultural skills acquired by mixing with international students from different cultural backgrounds. Positive impacts were also identified for both staff and the institution which reflected benefits articulated in other studies (Sweeney, 2012; Brandenburg et al., 2014) and are in alignment with the Higher Education Academy’s Internationalising Higher Education Framework (2014). Outward mobility has a positive impact on a university. It raises the international image of the university, it improves the position in internationalisation rankings and enhances the employability of mobile students and the chances for international joint research for staff. This reflects on the overall performance of the university, enhancing the institution’s quality, promoting the multicultural dimension for the student body and enhancing inter-organisational learning. The above studies affirm that outward mobility for staff can help in developing research networks and joint international projects. Further benefits are:

- The attraction of more international students in the future;
- the development of new teaching and learning processes when conducting international outward mobility; and
- the evolution of future business opportunities.

Most previous studies that measure the impact of outward mobility on staff development and on institutional development employ traditional single tools for their analysis. The questionnaires and the interviews are the most popular tools used in these studies. A common ground for all previous research is that they lack a comprehensive approach.

### **3. Impact of Study Abroad and Outward Mobility on Students**

Many studies and reports have investigated the impact of study abroad and outward mobility on students. According to these studies, study abroad and outward mobility have a great positive impact on mobile students.

<b>2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Universities UK</li> <li>· European Commission</li> <li>· Cintio &amp; Grassi</li> </ul>
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<b>2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Finell</li> <li>· Jacobone &amp; Moro</li> <li>· A World of Experience Report</li> <li>· Jackson &amp; Michelson</li> <li>· Gone International Report</li> <li>· Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap, &amp; Axelsson</li> <li>· Potts</li> <li>· Standley</li> <li>· Bridger</li> <li>· Yang</li> </ul>
<b>2014</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Terrant et al.</li> <li>· Deakin</li> </ul>
<b>2013</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Oleksiyenko</li> <li>· James</li> <li>· Strategy for Outward Mobility Report</li> <li>· Huang</li> </ul>
<b>2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Salajan &amp; Chiper</li> </ul>
<b>2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Diamond, Walkley, Forbes, Hughes, &amp; Sheen</li> <li>· Kammermann, Stalder, &amp; Hättich</li> <li>· Morris</li> </ul>
<b>2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· King, Findley, &amp; Ahrens</li> <li>· Gables</li> </ul>
<b>2009</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Crossman &amp; Clarke</li> <li>· Mohajeri &amp; Gillespie</li> <li>· Mukhtar, Omar, &amp; Hunger</li> </ul>
<b>2008</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Wiers-Jenssen</li> </ul>
<b>2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Teichler &amp; Janson</li> <li>· Marcotte, Desroches, &amp; Poupart</li> </ul>
<b>2005</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Williams</li> </ul>
<b>2004</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Sutton &amp; Rubin</li> </ul>
<b>1998</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Bremer</li> </ul>

**Table 1** Overview of Studies on the impact of students' outward mobility

To understand the impact of outward mobility, it is important to understand the drivers behind it. Future employability is the main reason behind students' desire to pursue international outward mobility. In an investigation of the mobility and destination choice motives of 360 Erasmus students from 26 European countries, Lesjak et al. (2015)

**Drivers behind outward mobility**

found that international study mobility is driven by students' desire to grow personally and professionally while studying abroad, but students' choice of a destination depends on the destination's general as well as touristic characteristics. Both mobility and destination choice motivations are linked with the students' personality and situation. Using a multi-methods approach, based on student interviews and report analysis, Deakin (2014) identifies five main drivers to Erasmus work placement mobility: employability, the economic downturn and subsequent failure to secure a placement in the UK, language, finance and personal factors. Overall, employability is identified as the main driver to the mobility of Erasmus work placement students. In a study on the intentions of Chinese students for studying abroad, Huang (2013) identified careers intention, future career development and employability as the key factors behind studying abroad. In an investigation of the motivations and outcomes of international mobility programmes collected from business graduates of the University of Quebec in Montreal, Marcotte et al. (2007) revealed that interests in intercultural contact and foreign languages were significant drivers of participation. Three types of perceived effects of international mobility were reported: self-development, cultural awareness and career advancement.

**International experience required on the labour market**

Employers need graduates who understand and can manage international and intercultural relationships and who understand the increasingly global nature of the world of work (Diamond et al., 2011). The European Commission's 2009 Green Paper, *Promoting the Learning Mobility of Young People*, stresses the fact that learning mobility, and specifically transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new skills, is one of the fundamental ways in which individuals, particularly young people, can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development (Morris, 2011). With the International Unit's *UK Strategy for Outward Mobility* (2013) in place and the UK committed to the European target that in 2020, 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad, it seems timely to reach agreement on some standard methods for measuring the impact of all outward mobility placements.

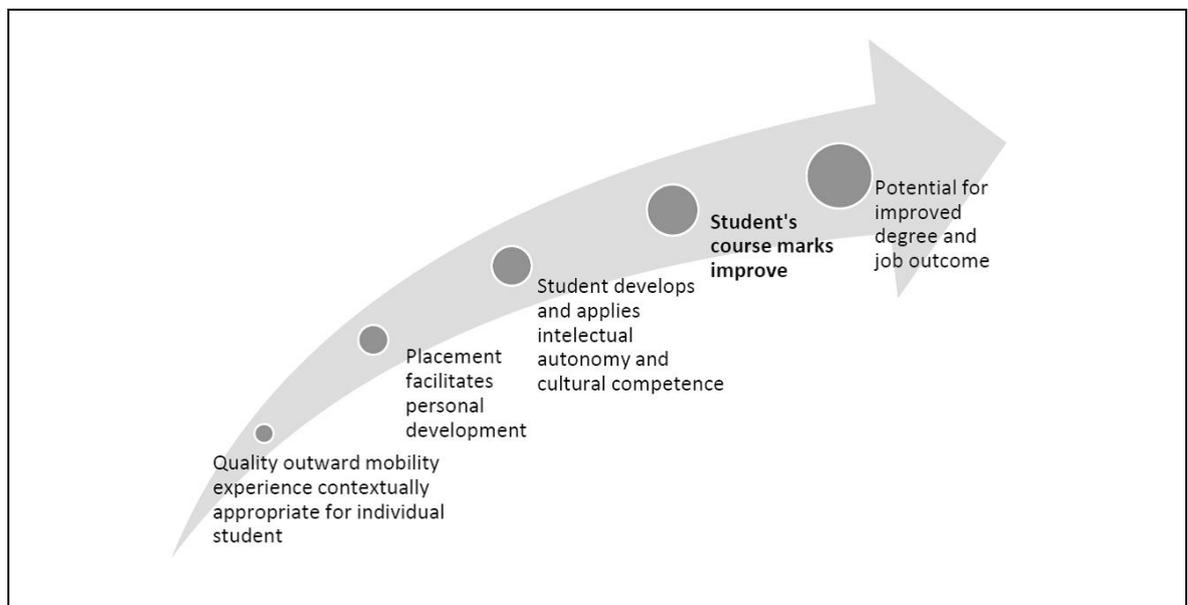
Temporary study in another European country supported by the Erasmus programmes is not only viewed as academically, culturally and linguistically valuable, but is also expected to have a positive impact on subsequent employment and work (Teichler & Janson, 2007). In a study for international apprentices in Switzerland, Kammermann et al. (2011) found that such apprenticeships offer favourable learning opportunities that foster employability and upward mobility after graduation. In a study for mobile students who assessed themselves with regards to their study abroad experience through Erasmus+ exchange programmes, the students refer to the international experiences gained through learning mobility as valued by employers (Finell, 2015), which by then enhances the university rate of employment for gradu-

ates. Using a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews, in an investigation of the perceptions of 110 learners who are taught in two content and language integrated learning (CLIL) degree-based programmes combined with a peculiar sandwich curriculum in Taiwan, Yang (2015) revealed that enhancing mobility and employability are two evidenced advantages of CLIL education. In an investigation of the aspects of international mobility in student research placements overseas, Standley (2015) highlights multiple interdependent drivers related to graduate employability and development of broad competencies and transferable skills in addition to subject-specific training, ‘international awareness’ being confirmed as a graduate attribute that is highly valued by employers (Standley, 2015).

Studies reflect on the fact that outward mobility will affect students’ employability. All studies refer to clear connections between international experience and employability, opportunities for experiential learning, language acquisition and the development of soft skills related to cultural understanding, personal characteristics and ways of thinking (Morris, 2011; Gables, 2010; Crossman & Clarke, 2009; Bremer, 1998; Mohajeri & Gillespie, 2009; Oleksiyenko, 2013; James, 2013; Jackson & Michelson, 2015; Salajan & Chiper, 2012; Bridger, 2015; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Muchtar, 2009; Potts, 2015).

**Clear connections  
between international  
experience and  
employability**

The Go International Report pointed out the positive outcomes of outward student mobility that could increase employability (Bridger, 2015). See figure (1).



**Figure 1**

**Adapted from *Academic Perspectives on the Outcomes of Outward Student Mobility*, Go International (Bridger, 2015).**

**Skills acquired by studying abroad**

*A World of Experience* (2015) produced by the British Council, highlights the following skills that are acquired by students from study abroad and outward mobility: flexibility and adaptability, innovation skills; and acquisition of language proficiency. Furthermore the participants of this report refer to the development of their career path as a result of outward mobility. In an Erasmus Impact Study published by the European Commission (2016) on the effects of Erasmus on the personality, skills and career of students of European regions, the level of six selected personality traits of students referred to as “Tolerance of Ambiguity”, “Curiosity”, “Confidence”, “Serenity”, “Decisiveness” and “Vigour” (problem-solving skills) before and after mobility have been investigated. Across Europe, 93% of the surveyed employers confirmed that the six traits were indeed important for the recruitment and professional development of their employees. This was even the case for a remarkable 98% of employers in Northern Europe, where the personality traits were valued the most by employers. The study refers to the fact that the above traits are acquired during the outward mobility of students.

**Comparison with non-mobilised students**

The positive effects of outward mobility become clearer when comparing mobilised students with non-mobilised students. Through a pre-test and post-test of two specific skills, intercultural adaptability and intercultural sensitivity, study abroad students were compared to students who stay on campus to measure their change during the course of the semester. Williams (2005) found that students who study abroad exhibit a greater change in intercultural communication skills after their semester abroad than students who stay on campus. Results also indicated that exposure to various cultures was the greatest predictor of intercultural communication skills. In a study conducted with both an experimental group and a control group, for students participating in the Erasmus programme and those continuing their regular course of study at their home university, Jacobone and Moro (2015) found that study abroad programmes have a positive impact on how the university students were seen by others. The highest values among Erasmus students in terms of outcomes were attributed to cultural enhancement, personal development and foreign language proficiency. Study abroad has, furthermore, an Europeanising impact in as much as it affects the self-identity of students. Using a pre-/post-test, two-by-two factor design of course location (study abroad versus home campus) by course subject matter (sustainability vs. non-sustainability), Terrant et al. (2014) found that it is the combination of location (abroad) and academic focus that yields the greatest increases in specified learning outcomes for study abroad.

**Advantages by studying abroad**

Wiers-Jenssen (2008) investigates the early career of graduates who have studied abroad (mobile students) compared to graduates who have undertaken their entire education at domestic higher education institutions (non-mobile students) and found that mobile students, more often than non-mobile students search for and gain work experi-

ence abroad. It is found also that, in the domestic labour market, mobile students hold jobs with more international assignments than non-mobile students. Cintio and Grassi (2016) examine the wage performance of two cohorts of Italian Ph.D. graduates associated with international mobility and find that labour mobility is associated with higher wages than normal graduates. The *Gone International* Report on the 2013/14 graduating cohort based at the UK Higher Education International Unit at Universities UK (2016) shows that by comparing mobile and non-mobile students' outcomes from a sample of the 2013/14 graduating cohort of UK undergraduates six months after graduating, unemployment rates among mobile students were lower than those for non-mobile students across almost all socioeconomic backgrounds. 5% of mobile graduates were unemployed or due to start work six months after graduation compared to 7% of their non-mobile peers. The average salary of a mobile student six months after graduation was £21,349 (compared to £20,519 for a non-mobile student). In terms of academic outcomes, a higher proportion of mobile students achieved a first-class or upper second-class in their degree (81%) compared with non-mobile students (72%).

Overall, the previous studies and reports indicate the following categories of the impact of study abroad and outward mobility on students:

- Boosting personal and self-development skills.
- Boosting global and intercultural awareness.
- Boosting opportunities for better employability and job prospects.

**3 categories of the impact of study abroad**

#### **4. Comprehensive Structure to Understand the Impact of Outward Mobility on University, Staff and Mobilised Students**

Despite the numerous articles and reports mentioned above, there is still a lack of practical measurements of the comprehensive impact of outward mobility on university, staff and students. Very few suggestions to measure the impact have been proposed by scholars and practitioners. For example, to measure impact on students in terms of degree and job outcome, a longitudinal, pre/post-mobility approach must be employed, as demonstrated in the GLOSSARI project (Sutton & Rubin, 2004), referred to by King et al. (2010), so using a robust longitudinal methodology looking at pre- and post-mobility performance and behaviour, begins to reveal a correlation between outward mobility and degree outcome and employability. Similarly, Bridger (2015) suggests in the *Go International* Report that the development and implementation of systematic, formalised approaches to measuring the academic and employability impact of outward mobility at institution and programme levels should become an embedded aspect of deliver-

**How to measure the impact of stays abroad**

**Understanding the organisational culture important**

ing outward mobility. Account should be taken of qualitative and quantitative evidence before and after mobility has taken place, for example pre- and post-mobility course marks.

Measuring the impact of outward mobility could not be completed without an in-depth understanding of the organisational culture of outward mobility within a university. Understanding the organisational culture of outward mobility requires investigating the motivations, objectives, organisations, obstacles and outcomes of outward mobility, the so called M4Os Approach (Ayoubi, 2008). Based on the M4Os Approach to analysing a phenomenon, this paper proposes the concept of *Comprehensive Structure of Outward Mobility*. The proposed structure considers different phases and methods for measuring the outward mobility as well as different sources of data and information.

The following phases are suggested:

**Phase 1: Understanding the motivations behind outward mobility**

Why do students, staff and university go for outward mobility? Is the university in real need of outward mobility? Why outward mobility rather than other styles of learning activities?

There are different tools that can be used to measure the motivations behind outward mobility such as questionnaires, interviews and university international strategy documents.

**Phase 2: Understanding the objectives of outward mobility**

What are students, staff and university looking to achieve from outward mobility? What are the direct and indirect objectives of conducting this activity?

There are different tools that can be used to measure the objectives of outward mobility including questionnaires, interviews, and university international strategy documents.

**Phase 3: Understanding the organisational structure of outward mobility**

How is the outward mobility organised? What are the current numbers and information related to outward mobility? Who are the people at the university that are responsible for this activity? What are the current procedures of outward mobility? Who are the main funding bodies for outward mobility? What is the current flow chart of outward mobility? Is there a conflict of interest between stakeholders? Who are the participants? What types of mobility are available?

There are different tools that can be used to measure the current organisational structure of outward mobility including questionnaires, inter-

views, university procedural analysis, international documents analysis and university international strategy documents.

**Phase 4: Understanding the obstacles of outward mobility**

What are the current difficulties of conducting outward mobility? What are the obstacles for students and staff going abroad? To what extent do university procedures hinder outward mobility? How is it possible to overcome these obstacles?

Questionnaires, interviews, university procedures and outward mobility documents are different tools that can be used to measure the obstacles of outward mobility.

**Phase 5: Understanding the outcomes of outward mobility**

What are the benefits achieved from outward mobility? How does outward mobility influence the whole university? How does it affect students and staff? How does it affect curricula? How does it affect strategy? How does it affect individuals' employability? How does it affect research? How does it affect learning and teaching? How does it affect institutional reputation? How does it affect ranking?

Questionnaires, interviews, university records, higher education newspapers, staff records, statistics, employers' records, LinkedIn profiles for mobile and non-mobile students, Facebook profiles for mobilised and non-mobilised students, documents and statistics available from the Alumni Office and the Employment Office, job announcements analysis, university achievements, prizes and ranking are all tools that can be employed by international managers at universities.

The above phases require a timeframe for implementation. The timeframe is based on sequential longitudinal measurement procedure. The outward mobility is measured before the mobility takes place, during the mobility, after the mobility takes place during the 6th to the 12th months, during the 6th to the 8th months after graduation, and more strategically, within three to five years of conducting the mobility. Table (1) presents a potential timeframe for measuring the comprehensive structure of outward mobility.

	Before the mobility takes place	During the mobility	6 to 12 months after the mobility	6 to 8 months after graduation	Within 3 to 5 years of graduation
<b>Understanding the Comprehensive Structure of Outward Mobility</b>	Ü	Ü	Ü	Ü	Ü
<b>1. Understanding the motivations behind outward mobility</b>	Ü				
1.1 Questionnaires to mobilised students	Ü				
1.2 Interviews with mobilised staff	Ü				
1.3 University international strategy analysis for the same period	Ü				
<b>2. Understanding the objectives of outward mobility</b>	Ü	Ü			
2.1 Questionnaires to mobilised students	Ü	Ü			
2.2 Interviews with mobilised staff	Ü	Ü			
1.3 University international strategy analysis for the same period	Ü	Ü			
<b>3. Understanding the organisations of outward mobility</b>	Ü	Ü			
3.1 Questionnaires analysis for the same period	Ü	Ü			
3.2 Interviews with mobilised staff	Ü	Ü			
3.3 University international strategy analysis for the same period	Ü	Ü			
3.4 University procedures analysis for the same period	Ü	Ü			
<b>4. Understanding the obstacles of outward mobility</b>	Ü	Ü	Ü		
4.1 Questionnaires to mobilised students	Ü	Ü	Ü		
4.2 Interviews with mobilised staff	Ü	Ü	Ü		
4.3 University international strategy analysis for the same period	Ü	Ü	Ü		
4.4 University procedures analysis for the same period	Ü	Ü	Ü		

4.5 Outward mobility documents analysis for the same period		ü	ü		
<b>5. Understanding the outcomes of outward mobility</b>			ü	ü	
5.1 Questionnaires to mobilised students			ü	ü	
5.2 Interviews with mobilised staff			ü	ü	
5.3 University records for mobility			ü	ü	
5.4 Higher education newspapers for specific outcomes			ü	ü	

**Table 2** Timeframe for measuring the comprehensive structure of outward mobility

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Previous studies indicate that, in general, as much as incoming mobility has an impact on university campus, outward mobility has an impact as well on increasing the internationalisation of the university, enhancing the quality of teaching and research, diversifying the student and the staff body and developing international joint projects. It also enhances professional development, the quality and quantity of academic scientific productivity and research cooperation for academic staff. Outward mobility has the greatest impact on mobilised students. Reports and studies indicate that outward mobility will increase the understanding of the global environment, enhance the skills for the labour market, boost job prospects, enhance personal development, increase cultural awareness, enhance intercultural communication skills, increase the awareness of graduates in the eyes of employers, enhance innovation skills, increase the probability for better academic achievements and better salaries.

The paper reflects on the lack of practical measurements of the impact of outward mobility on university, staff and students (Bridger, 2015; King et al., 2010; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). To understand and analyse the comprehensive structure of outward mobility, an approach was proposed by the author. Based on the M4O Approach (Ayoubi, 2008), five phases are suggested. Those are: Understanding the motivations behind outward mobility; understanding the objectives of outward mobility; understanding the organisational structure of outward mobility; understanding the obstacles of outward mobility; and understanding the outcomes of outward mobility. As suggested in the paper, this

approach requires a timeframe for implementation. This can be implemented before the mobility takes place, during the mobility, shortly after the mobility, and within three to five years of student graduation.

For managers at international offices, this approach could help to identify the benefits of outward mobility at the academic, administrative and strategic levels. Studying the comprehensive impact of outward mobility on three levels, staff, students and university, might help to attract campus students and staff to undertake more outward mobility in the future. The comprehensive structure of outward mobility could help managers in restructuring the current shape of outward mobility. At strategic levels, the university can employ such an approach for future planning of its outward mobility and for evaluating this aspect of its current internationalisation strategy.

Researchers in the field can further rely on this approach to measure the comprehensive impact of outward mobility on students, staff or university. The approach implies both quantitative and qualitative tools to study the impact of outward mobility. Interviews, questionnaires and document analysis are all measurement tools of such impact which are suggested in this paper. Each of the above proposed phases can by itself be an individual research topic. Longitudinal studies are also an important field of studies that need more attention by researchers in the future.

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