

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH IN FOCUS (iff Project)

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT REPORT¹

1. Mandate

International research cooperation plays a key role in addressing the major challenges our globalized world faces. Therefore, measures have been taken at all levels to ensure that research *can* and *must* be conducted in an international context.

In keeping with this development, UiO has set the overriding strategic goal to strengthen its position as a research university of high international standard. As an administrative and organizational contribution to achieving this goal, the project *International Research in Focus* (iff Project) has been launched with the aim of coordinating and strengthening UiO's reception services for international researchers.

Internationalizing research activity generates *increased researcher mobility*. Already today about ¼ of all researchers affiliated with UiO have foreign citizenship, and every year the University welcomes roughly 700-1000 researchers from around the world. These numbers are expected to increase significantly in the years to come and the strategies adopted are bound to spread the aspect of internationalization to more and more of our research environments.

Successful researcher mobility requires a *well functioning reception apparatus*. The quality of such an apparatus has a direct impact on the following areas:

- *International recruitment*: The best international researchers are obviously also the ones most sought after. When choosing between several job offers researchers place great value on the quality of reception services. A well functioning reception apparatus thus represents a significant competitive advantage to international recruitment.
- *Quality and completion of research stay*: Researchers are not only professionals but also human beings and will only be able to perform professionally to the best of their ability if their own and accompanying family members' social and cultural needs are adequately met. Studies show that the most common reason for disruption of contract by international academics does not stem from professional problems but from the researcher's and/or accompanying family members' maladjustment to their new home country.
- *Research conditions*: Research stays abroad demand practical and administrative adjustments in a broad range of areas. Reception services alleviate researchers here so that they can concentrate as much as possible on their research.
- *Resource administration*: Well-planned hospitality generates a surplus of energy for all parties involved. Poorly planned hospitality on the other hand can quickly develop into a devourer of resources with major repercussions and an according potential for frustration.
- *International reputation*: International researchers are an institution's most important professional ambassadors. The way they experience their research stay at UiO impacts our international reputation and thus our future recruiting ability.

In the light of these implications a well-functioning reception apparatus must be considered a *prerequisite* for UiO to achieve its ambitious internationalization goal. The existing fragmented and poorly coordinated services do not satisfy these requirements. Therefore, the iff project received the mandate to develop a reception concept with a clear and appropriate allocation of responsibility, a comprehensive service profile, and systematic processes for quality assurance.

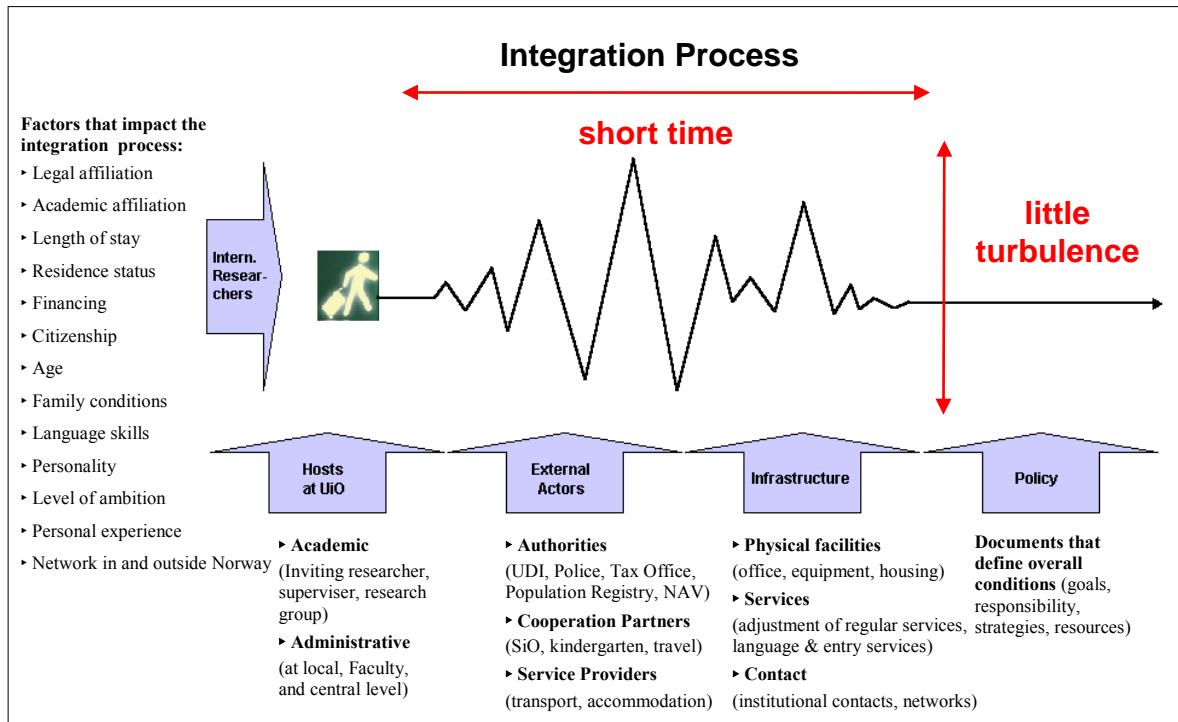
2. Holistic Reception Concept

The task of a reception apparatus is to render an international researcher's integration process at UiO as short and smooth as possible. The task is essentially accomplished by interplay between five groups of actors: the international researcher her-/himself, host actors at UiO, external actors, infrastructure, and policy (cf. figure on the following page).

The groups of actors are heterogeneous and the interplay between them highly varied and complex. There are innumerable factors that can prove disruptive for the integration process of an individual international researcher. Moreover, the interplay takes place under conditions that are exposed to constant change.

¹ The complete project report is available at http://www.uio.no/for_ansatte/arbeidsstotte/prosjekter/iff/english.html

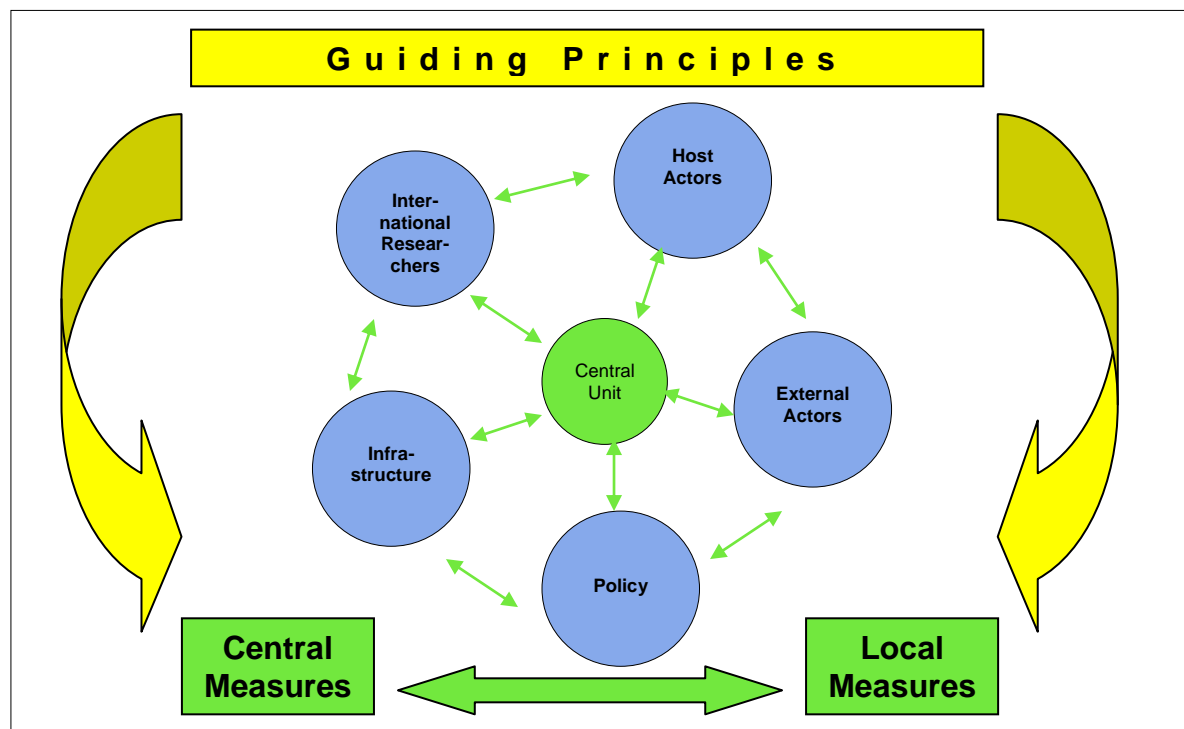
Therefore, a reception apparatus must assure that *each* group of actors has the optimal prerequisites to render its distinct contribution to the integration process and to be able to cooperate smoothly and effectively with the other groups.



This presupposes a *holistic concept* that:

- takes the institution's internationalization goals as a starting point;
- is based on a solid understanding of each group of actors' distinct challenges;
- takes care of all groups of actors' fundamental needs;
- provides the reception apparatus with a sustainable structure so that potentials for synergy can be realized;
- contains appropriate processes for quality assurance and development to assure that the reception apparatus maintains a minimum standard and is renewed in accordance with changing needs & conditions.

Based on extensive surveys, testing of ideas through pilot projects, and models adopted by *best practice* institutions in Europe and the USA, a reception concept has been developed consisting of three main elements: guiding principles, central measures, and local measures.



Guiding Principles

We recommend the adoption of five guiding principles that provide the basis for the division of responsibility and tasks and ensure that the development of the existing reception apparatus into a coordinated concept happens in an expedient manner and can orient itself according to a common, overarching course:

1 Principle of Decentralized Integration and Centralized Coordination

The integration of international researchers in the local work environment remains basically the responsibility and duty of the host departments which, however, are supported by a common, centrally coordinated reception infrastructure.

2 Principle of Three Fixed Points

Both international researchers and local hosts are provided with three fixed points to help them function in an optimal manner in their roles as guests and hosts.

Fixed points for international researchers:

- (1) local professional contact person
- (2) local administrative contact person
- (3) central resource unit

Fixed points for local hosts:

- (1) "guest friendly" local work environment
- (2) central reception infrastructure
- (3) central resource unit

3 Matrix Principle

The reception apparatus relies as much as possible on existing resources and services that are coordinated and further developed to

serve in an optimal manner the integration function of the reception apparatus. Ensures effectiveness and synergy. Requires an initiating and coordinating central unit.

4 Integration Principle

Internationalization of research permeates the entire UiO. International researchers are treated as an equal and integrated part of the University community. The concept of *universal design* is normative for the development of the research environment at UiO. The individual elements of the reception apparatus are designed according to their specific function and their relationship to the overall reception concept to ensure a sustainable structure of the reception apparatus and the realization of synergy effects.

5 Quality Principle

The quality of the reception apparatus shall correspond to the quality of research. Ensures that the reception apparatus serves as a stamp of quality and an enhanced visiting card for UiO's research environments. Ensures UiO's reception services a minimum standard.

These principles are to be anchored at all levels and made concrete and alive in all parts of the institution.

Central Measures

At central level we recommend the implementation of five packages of initiatives:

1 Central Unit

There is to be established a central resource and service unit for incoming researcher mobility at UiO that shall serve all groups of actors and provide central maintenance, development and quality assurance functions.

2 Written Information

There is to be implemented a holistic information concept that ensures all groups of actors easy access to reliable, user focused, and coordinated written information on integration sensitive topics.

3 Institutional Contacts

The central unit is responsible for establishing and maintaining contacts to external institutions to ensure a regular exchange of information and optimal cooperation in the area of incoming researcher mobility.

4 Networks

The central unit is responsible for establishing/continuing and facilitating appropriate UiO internal networks within and between the groups of actors and participating in/contributing to relevant UiO internal and external networks.

5 Statistics

There shall be developed and implemented a statistics concept that provides UiO with a reliable and regularly up-dated overview of the number, composition, and distribution of international researchers affiliated with its institution. We recommend that this measure be organized as a separate project.

Local Measures

The guiding principles will have to be specified at faculty and department level by the individual units and will vary according to the units' size, academic profile, international exposure, financial situation, etc. However, a local measure plan will necessarily have to contain the following elements:

1 *Local Host Policy*

Specification of the basic conditions for the local reception apparatus, including a clear placement of responsibilities and adequate allocation of resources.

2 *Local Reception Apparatus*

Implementation of local host policy and systematic examination of local work environment, services, and routines with regard to making them inclusive for international researchers. Compatibility with central reception infrastructure.

3 *Local Reception Competence*

Ensuring good local reception competence by providing local hosts with knowledge of local and central reception infrastructure, affiliation with relevant networks, participation in relevant training courses, English language competence and culture sensitive communication skills.

The outlined concept takes into account that the implementation and maintenance of an integrated and professional reception apparatus for international researchers is a highly complex and dynamic process that affects the *entire* institution. The guiding principles help the individual actors to quickly orient themselves in the "reception landscape". By gathering basic maintenance, development, and quality assurance functions in a central unit the reception apparatus is provided with a security net and an effective and flexible fulcrum. The local measures ensure that every international researcher steps into a hospitable space where her/his interface with UiO is the most important.

3. Implementation

In the course of the project several processes have been initiated that have impacted the current reception of international researchers at UiO. Thus, a number of the measures suggested above already are partially or fully implemented:

1 *Functions of a Central Unit*

- Helpdesk for [hosts](#) and [international researchers](#)
- Training
 - [Norwegian courses for researchers/partners](#)
 - [Tax seminar](#)
 - Seminar on regulations pertaining to incoming researcher mobility
 - Visit to the Service Centre for Foreign Workers
- Coordinating researcher accommodation
- [Social integration measures](#)

2 *Written Information*

- Websites
 - [International Researchers](#)
 - [Vertskapshåndbok](#)
 - [Utenlandsopphold](#)
- Translation of rules, forms, and templates
- Access to [UiO internal news and information channels](#)

3 *Institutional Contacts*

- Administration of foreign nationals
- Tax administration
- NAV
- SiO

4 *Network*

- UiO internally
 - Administrative hosts
 - Forum for researcher education
 - Forum for CoE/CfRBI
- UiO externally
 - [ERA-MORE Norway](#)
 - UDI's user council for Norwegian employers
 - Cooperation with UiB and NTNU
 - Cooperation with *best practice* institutions in Germany and Switzerland
 - [International Network Norway](#) (OCC)

This overview shows that both guests and hosts have far better conditions today to succeed in their respective roles of integrating international researchers at UiO compared to when the ifif project was launched.

However, there remains a considerable amount of work to be done to extend the central reception infrastructure to cover all basic needs. The faculties and departments will need time and assistance to develop local host schemes that provide UiO with a reception standard that is in accordance with its research ambitions. Furthermore, the capacity of the central university administration to service the increasing demand for already implemented measures is now clearly overextended.

Presently, the implementation process has not developed far enough to allow a proper assessment as to the kind of permanent organizational structure an integrated and professional reception apparatus should have and which resources are required. Therefore, we suggest extending the project for an additional two years to achieve the following specific goals:

- 1 Establishment of a central resource and service unit for incoming researcher mobility with the roles and tasks outlined in paragraph 7.3.1 of the ifif project report. We suggest that the unit be linked to the Organisation and Personnel Department (OPA) and staffed with two advisers and one higher executive officer. The unit is to develop an action plan and to write an annual report. The unit's final organizational affiliation, staffing, and mandate is to be assessed at the end of the second project period.
- 2 Implementation of a holistic information concept for incoming researcher mobility as outlined in paragraph 7.2.2 and appendix 8 of the ifif project report. At the central level highest priority shall be given to the up-grading of the *Host Website* and the maintenance and expansion of the *International Researcher Website*.
- 3 Development of a strategy for researcher accommodation at UiO and implementation of an according administration scheme. Responsibility: OPA, Department of Research Administration (FA), Technical Department (TA) and Finance and Planning Department (ØPA).
- 4 Development and implementation of host schemes for international researchers at the faculties and departments in accordance with UiO's reception concept. Incentive: Announcement of a competition. Responsibility: Local units. Support from the central resource and service unit.

4. Prerequisites

The suggested implementation plan requires, as we see it, the following formal decisions:

- 1 The University Leadership/University Board adopts the reception concept for international researchers as outlined in the ifif project report.
- 2 OPA is granted additional resources to hire one adviser and one higher executive officer for a two year period.