

Internationalisation of higher education: the why and the how

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Opening Address

ABSTRACT: This paper describes the development of student mobility between the Nordic countries; between those countries and the rest of Europe; and between the Nordic countries and other regions of the world. Also touched on in this paper are the challenges of staff mobility with regard to the two components of traditional academic mobility and job migration. With new initiatives by the European Union Commission, job migration of researchers and higher education teachers may increase rapidly in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The Nordic Model

The basic ideas of Nordic co-operation are far from market-orientated because social cohesion has been a leading principle. Nordic countries have succeeded in combining economic growth with social cohesion. Observers around the world have been amazed that the Nordic economies can prosper and grow in spite of high tax wedges and an egalitarian distribution of income.

Present economic and social trends, including globalisation and demographic change, pose significant challenges to this model as people have known it. There is a need to focus on the core tasks of the welfare state and to clarify the scope of the services that citizens are entitled to, including education, which has been seen as a central element in the combined striving for economic growth and social cohesion. The social dimension of higher education was introduced in the Nordic countries 50 years before its appearance in the Bologna Process, i.e. all qualified applicants should have the opportunity for higher education, irrespective of socio-economic conditions. In each country a college sector was established in parallel with the traditional university sector. Gradually, the difference between the two sectors is disappearing, with colleges being renamed polytechnics or university colleges, and some of them even have been accredited as universities.

There still are no tuition fees for Nordic students in the state-owned majority of higher education institutions and each country has a well-functioning student support system. It is not considered realistic to share such privileges with an increasing number of future incoming international students.

Since the 1970s, co-operation in higher education has been supported and stimulated by the Nordic Council of Ministers, with agreements on admission and recognition of higher education long before Bologna. The arguments used for justifying the Nordic co-operation in higher education originally were non-economic, while newer trends of internationalisation are at least to some extent driven by economic arguments.

NORDIC STUDENT MOBILITY

Free mobility of students between the Nordic countries has been a practice for decades, for a long time without formal agreements. As particular fields of study became popular, pragmatic regulations were introduced viz. quotas for Nordic students in individual countries. Admission to some studies (such as medicine and veterinary medicine) might be limited or reserved for nationals only. Over a long time, Norway was buying study places for airplane engineers (aeronautics) in Sweden and, for a few years, there was extra capacity for business administration in Denmark. On the

other hand, Norway reserved study places for Icelandic students in forestry, fisheries and other special fields, free of charge. At the same time, most Nordic countries were, and still are, supporting national students in countries outside the region.

With Denmark as the only Nordic member state of the EU until 1995, the Erasmus programme (European Regional Action Scheme for Mobility of University Students) at first, only contributed marginally to the student exchange between the Nordic countries. In 1988, the Nordplus programme was introduced as a Nordic parallel to Erasmus. It introduced a new flow of exchange students in addition to the traditional free movers, who stayed abroad until their degrees were obtained.

However, as the Erasmus programme opened up to the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries, and Finland and Sweden joined the European Union, the Nordic dimension gradually was overshadowed by the European dimension. With the Bologna Process, the European co-operation has very much influenced Nordic higher education systems. Together with other European countries the Nordic countries have been building a common framework to realise the idea that students and staff should be able to move freely within the European Higher Education Area, having full recognition of their qualifications. Each country has developed a three-cycle degree system and introduced a national quality assurance system co-operating in a Europe-wide network. The long-time Nordic mutual recognition of degrees and study periods has been broadened to a Europe-wide obligation through the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Thus, 50 years of Nordic co-operation has been built into a European co-operation in higher education that has transformed dramatically the education system in each country, now with a common structure and including for the first time a common degree system in the Nordic countries. This makes Nordic co-operation easier, but it also opens up to a wider market.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The 2005 report *Rethinking Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education* sees Nordic co-operation in higher education as a successful regional form of internationalisation of higher education [1]. However, the report points out that recent developments both in Europe and more widely, have made it necessary to reconsider the way in which Nordic collaboration is organised and implemented.

Furthermore, there is no generally agreed understanding of the relation between the terms international and global. In this paper, the term *international* refers to relations involving more than one state and the term *internationalisation* is used for processes leading to international activity; it may be international co-operation, international competition or international trade. The term, *global*, is used for worldwide processes, such as global pollution and global trade.

In higher education the label, global, implies new kinds of relationship between continents, regions, states, higher education systems and even individual institutions, which are increasingly seen as market relationships - and which need to be distinguished from non-market relationships, based on more traditional links or aid and development agendas, for which the international label seems more appropriate.

It is generally understood that internationalisation is one way for national states, higher education systems and institutions, to meet global changes.

INTERNATIONALISATION OF DANISH HIGHER EDUCATION

In 2006, a governmental committee chaired by the Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, published a strategy for Denmark in the global economy. This strategy identified two main challenges for Danish society: that Denmark should be a strong competitor on the global market but Denmark should also continue to have strong social coherence promoted through a welfare system. In the field of higher education, the strategy implies that:

- 50 per cent of all young persons in Denmark should obtain a higher education.
- Everyone should be engaged in Life Long Learning (LLL).
- All educational programmes should have a global perspective.
- New and attractive educational programmes should be developed in natural sciences, technology and health.
- The Danish educational system should accept diversity and provide room for as many different backgrounds as possible.
- Within higher education, stipends for going abroad should be introduced.
- Higher education institutions should be committed to formulating goals for internationalisation of their educational programmes.

To boost the internationalisation process, the Government established in 2007 The Council for Internationalisation of Danish Education. Its terms of reference include the following:

- To advise on initiatives to ensure Danish students at all levels acquire global and intercultural competences and skills combined with a global view.
- To advise on initiatives to make Danish education and Danish educational institutions attractive to foreign students and foreign teachers at all levels.
- To advise on initiatives for Danish educational institutions for the development of professional environments, which can attract and hold qualified manpower from abroad.

In its years of existence, the Council has promoted a number of themes. As an example, a study of the framework for teacher-training programmes has shown a number of difficulties in the internationalisation process for teachers' education, seen from a traditional, economical and legislative point of view. This is perhaps not surprising, because the roots of teacher-training in Denmark lie in national culture and language. However, if internationalisation has to be boosted, first and foremost teachers' education and teachers are key elements to the entire internationalisation process in the educational system as a whole.

In 2009, The Danish Council for Research Policy proposed that the number of foreign PhD students in Denmark should be raised to 20 per cent of the total number in a planned process of increasing considerably the total number of PhD students in Denmark.

The proposal contained a number of initiatives directed towards internationalisation of education and research in Denmark:

- To expand the number of higher educational programmes being offered in English.
- To ensure that teachers and students are so proficient in English that the quality of the educational programmes do not suffer.
- To expand the amount of flexible stipends and tuition waivers in order to attract to Denmark talented students from abroad.
- To stimulate talented students from abroad to stay in Denmark after graduation.
- To increase the marketing of Danish educational programmes abroad.
- To remove the legislative barriers for the possibility of offering Danish educational programmes abroad and for entering into international educational alliances.
- To speed up the processing of visa applications from foreign students.
- To support the universities in their recruitment of international PhD students.
- To reduce drop-out rates at Danish higher education institutions.
- To develop attractive study environments for students.
- To inspire higher education institutions to develop educational lines that focus on strong relations to society; to use case-based learning and an early introduction to innovation.

INTERNATIONALISATION WHILE GUARDING NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Present-day internationalisation of higher education implies courses and study programmes being taught in English and internationally relevant curricula. At the same time, all Nordic countries are very much aware of the importance of taking care of their language(s) and their cultural heritage. This should not be contrary to internationalisation of higher education, and certainly the Bologna Declaration underlines the importance of taking full account of the diversity of culture and language.

There are a number of reasons for this:

- *The political argument:* The majority of the population in Europe speaks and writes a national language that cannot be eliminated and must be under continuing development.
- *The cultural argument:* The language reflects and expresses a national world of experience.
- *The mental argument:* The national language is an integral part of citizens' personality and consciousness and, thus, most operative in their daily lives, including arts and science.
- *The global argument:* Language is a contribution to the richness of cultures in the world.

In Nordic countries, the teaching of English starts in elementary school and continues all the way through 12 years of compulsory schooling, which means English, generally, is understood and spoken in the population at large. However, to use English as the language of instruction in higher education requires further training for students, as well as teachers and this is often done through studies abroad in English-speaking countries.

At universities, one would find that Bachelor-level programmes often are taught in the national language on the basis of English textbooks, and that Master-level programmes are taught in English. However, the academic expertise expected may place more profound demands on language abilities in the future. If the economic growth in China and other countries in Asia should continue, then, Nordic people, to a higher extent, will be exposed to languages, which only few

persons in the country presently know and master. Thus, universities (and large companies) must find ways to strengthen the possibilities of learning and mastering these languages.

CONCLUSIONS

International Teaching Staff

In all Nordic countries, the internationalisation of higher education has been seen as one element in a strategy for meeting international and global challenges. Whether to educate for a national labour market or for an international or global labour market has not always been made clear by governments and ministries.

All Nordic countries, and most European ones over the coming years, will have to face a shortage in the national recruitment of skilled workers and specialists. Immigration policies are being adjusted for a dual purpose: to limit the flow of refugees and to increase the flow of highly qualified specialists. Within Europe, there is in principle a free flow and mobility, which might be stimulated further by EU programmes and by national schemes.

However, it should be made clear that there are two types of mobility: traditional academic mobility in the form of exchange or shorter visits abroad, but also, a one-sided recruitment of international students and candidates for the national labour markets.

The EU Commission has made some very visible efforts to stimulate the mobility of researchers by introducing the European Charter for Researchers; the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers; the Scientific Visa for researchers from third countries (2005); and the proposal of Social Security and Supplementary Pension Rights for all foreign researchers. Further, a Human Resources Strategy for Researchers has been announced (2008) to improve job opportunities for researchers. Thus, the Commission is now focusing on job migration and less on academic exchange.

For higher education this will mean that teaching staff will become more and more international. This opens up new possibilities: Russian-born professors may give courses in Russian; Chinese-born professors may lecture in Chinese - for instance at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU), Copenhagen, Denmark. English professors will master the language of the most popular courses for international students. To make use of this potential, one must know the ethnic background of the staff. In some countries, it is not allowed to include this in the data base as it is seen as personal, but there must be ways that higher education can be allowed to make the best use of its international staff instead of labelling them all as employees of a national Nordic university.

Bilingual Population

In our part of the world, the belief is that use of the English language in academia (and industry) will more and more become a normal situation and more and more people in the Nordic countries will, as a consequence of this, become bilingual. However, the author does not think - as feared by a number of national politicians - that Nordic languages will lose their influence on daily life and believe that, in the future, it will also be possible to discuss science in our mother tongues. Further, most of the Nordic languages (Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish) will continue as has always happened, to take in English words, which then become a natural part of daily conversation, but now at an accelerated speed.

REFERENCES

1. Maassen, P. and T.M. Uppström, T.M., Rethinking Nordic Cooperation in Higher Education - Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Northern Europe in Light of Bologna. TemaNord, 520 (2005).