
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY: A COMPARISON OF
NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICY RESPONSES IN DENMARK, GERMANY,
SWEDEN AND THE NETHERLANDS.**

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INTRODUCTION

This summary is based on the findings from a desk-based research project commissioned by The Danish Agency for international Education that was undertaken between November 2008 and August 2009. The project focused on analysing current trends in international student mobility in higher education, and comparing the Danish response to these trends with national strategies and policies and institutional activities in a small sample of countries namely Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. These countries were selected for comparison because in recent years they have, to varying degrees, increased their national-level strategic focus on attracting increasing numbers of international students (both from within and outside the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Areas (EEA)) through co-ordinating and targeting their marketing activities, revising their policy and regulatory frameworks, and supporting institutions to develop recruitment strategies and programmes targeted at international students.

The research findings are intended to provide valuable comparative information and guidance to all Danish higher education institutions as they develop their international higher education strategies, and their policies and activities related to international student mobility.

1.TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

Full-degree international student mobility is growing, and the level of unmet demand worldwide means it will increase further in the future. There is considerable scope for all comparator countries to increase international student recruitment beyond traditional regional markets (especially Denmark and Sweden where international students comprise less than 10% of total recruitment). However, the nature of student flows is becoming more complex and volatile as students have a wider range of options for overseas study, including studying at home via transnational education.

In line with global trends, all four comparator countries (Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany) have experienced significant growth in inward mobility in recent years and a stabilisation or drop in outward mobility. All four countries are seeking to diversify their source countries for international students. Most international students in the comparator countries are from neighbouring countries, although Germany and the Netherlands also recruit significant numbers of full-degree non EU/EEA students due to their level of English-language provision and reputation for high-quality vocationally-orientated education. Historically, Denmark and Sweden have focused more on recruiting exchange students from neighbouring countries, although the countries are now seeking to increase their non-EU/EEA full-degree recruitment, particularly at Master's level and outward mobility. All four countries face challenges to their future international recruitment, either through the recent or planned introduction of full-cost fees for non-EU/EEA students (Denmark and Sweden) and increases in fee levels in the Netherlands and structural alignment with Bologna in Germany. Institutions in the four countries are also competing with institutions worldwide for highly-qualified students, and therefore must seek to gain competitive advantage through a focused and strategic approach to international student recruitment.

Therefore competition for the best international students is likely to increase in the future, and Danish institutions must be fully committed to recruiting and supporting international students, meeting their needs for shorter and more vocationally orientated programmes, and to establishing a reputation for quality and value-for-money, or students are likely to go elsewhere. Danish institutions also need to recognise their position in the global market and target specific types of international students from particular countries and regions.

Short-term mobility is either stabilising or declining as students from countries with highly-developed higher education systems question the value of studying abroad for shorter periods as part of their studies in a challenging economic climate where fees and associated living costs are increasing, and students are seeking to

enter the employment market as soon as possible. The Danish higher education sector needs to develop creative options that will encourage home students to study abroad (including financial support) and international students to come to Denmark for short periods. These include initiatives such as Summer Schools and the development of study abroad options which are financially supported and include innovative elements such as work placements.

2. STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONALISATION

Developing a strategic approach to internationalisation is becoming more important to national governments and individual institutions worldwide. The comparator countries all have well-established internationalisation strategies at the national level, and the Danish and German strategic approaches are closely linked with globalisation objectives in which educational objectives are closely aligned with trade, and cultural and economic development policies. Student mobility - both inward and outward - is now widely perceived to be one of the key elements in the goal of improving economic competitiveness in a global knowledge economy as it is closely linked with skilled migration and targets for improving the quality of scientific output. Flows of students in and out of national higher education systems enable institutions to recruit the best scholars and skilled researchers (who may choose to remain in the country to work), fill places in strategically important subject areas where there are domestic shortfalls, and enrich the cultural diversity of campuses and helping home students to develop global awareness. Where full-cost fees are charged, they can also bring direct benefits to institutions (and indirect benefits to national economies) through providing an additional income stream that can be reinvested to enhance the quality of educational provision and student support and can help to reduce the impact of falling per student public investment in higher education.

Strategies to improve student mobility are well-established. The key tactical elements of the strategies are described in the following sections and include marketing, curriculum reform and other policy mechanisms and initiatives. However, there is some evidence (in Sweden and Germany in particular) that national strategic approaches are not widely put into practice at institutional level as universities and colleges are finding it difficult to develop their international activities. A combination of limited experience of actively recruiting international students and reductions in public funding for higher education have meant that higher education institutions (HEIs) still require significant initial government support and direction to enhance their international activities beyond traditional interregional academic linkages. This level of investment varies considerably across the comparator countries, although in Germany and the Netherlands there is significant short- to medium-term government support for internationalisation although the onus is usually placed on institutions to fund this activity themselves especially long term.

The Danish higher education sector shares these challenges, but there is an opportunity for Danish institutions to gain competitive advantage should they sharpen their strategic focus and implementation of their internationalisation strategies. It will become increasingly important for the implementation of international strategies that they are regularly reviewed and the strategies updated as the global context changes.

3. MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

As the international student recruitment market becomes more competitive, it is becoming more important that national HE sectors and institutions are able to market themselves effectively to potential students and other stakeholders that are involved in student decision-making. Students can now access information about countries, institutions and programmes from a range of sources, and it is important that countries and institutions proactively position and brand themselves in an increasingly crowded global market in order to attract the most highly-qualified students.

National level marketing activities are becoming increasingly important elements of internationalisation strategies, particularly when there are targets to increase international student recruitment. Some countries and institutions have historically high levels of visibility and strong reputations for quality and value for money worldwide (e.g. the USA, and the UK) whilst most other countries are focusing on national branding and enhancing the visibility and awareness of their HE sectors through targeted marketing activities in different parts of the world using national agencies. Whilst Denmark (through The Danish Agency for International Education) and Sweden (via the Swedish Institute) are developing their marketing activities, the Netherlands is a leader in this area via its network of offices worldwide (in place since 2001), its national agency (Nuffic) and branding activities such as Study in Holland. Germany too (via the DAAD) is investing heavily in expanding new and emerging markets whilst all four countries are developing networks of representative offices overseas. In many cases the national marketing strategy is linked in with other policy activities related to English-language provision, immigration and employment requirements, student support and international partnership activity. In the Netherlands, institutions are only able to make use of Nuffic services if they are accredited and have signed up to the Code of Conduct for recruiting international students. However, at institutional level, effective marketing activities appear restricted to a few high-profile institutions in most countries. This is likely to be because of the significant investment required for an overseas marketing campaign, and thus there is a key role for national governments at providing resources to enable institutions to raise their international profile at least until they generate sufficient income from non-EU/EEA tuition fees.

The Danish government via The Danish Agency for International Education is taking significant steps to improve the marketing of Danish higher education to non-EU/EEA students, and investment in national-level marketing activities needs to increase as the comparator countries are continuing to invest in their own national agencies. At the institutional level there is an opportunity for Danish universities and colleges to gain competitive advantage through improving their own marketing strategies, since these are not yet widely developed in most countries.

4. STUDENT FINANCE AND TUITION FEES

The financial aspect of full-degree international mobility is becoming increasingly important to potential students (and their funders) as cost-aware international students seek to balance the cost of the total study package (fees, living costs, working regulation, etc.) with the perceived value of their overseas study experience (educational quality, employability, etc.). In short-term mobility, Study Abroad programmes and Summer Schools usually attract fees, but exchange programmes do not. To encourage study abroad by home students, all comparator countries have developed policies to help ensure the portability of government financial support when overseas.

International students are wary of being viewed as 'cash cows' and are anxious to receive value for money for their investment in their overseas education. A key challenge for the comparator countries is that they all charge (or are planning to charge) non EU/EEA international students tuition fees as they seek to reduce their public funding commitments by no longer subsidising all non-EU/EEA students. Denmark has recently introduced fees and has experienced a drop in non EU/EEA recruitment. Sweden is planning to introduce fees for non EU/EEA students in 2011, whilst the Netherlands introduced full-cost fees for non-EU/EEA students in 1996. In Germany all students pay relatively low fees, but students also must pay other charges such as services and registration fees. In all four countries, the intention is that tuition fee income from non-EU/EEA students will help institutions to improve the quality of education and support services for all students and will help institutions to become more globally competitive. However, tuition fees combined with living costs and other expenses can make these countries relatively expensive study destinations – particularly since the majority of non-EU/EEA students are self-funded. The comparator countries are still less expensive overall than countries such as the UK and the USA but, as total study costs rise, value for money becomes an increasingly important factor and is less well-established in mainland Europe than in the major English-speaking destination countries.

International students outside the EU/EEA from countries with large private HE sectors may be used to paying for their education overseas, but expect high quality education and support and a return on their investment in terms of employability. In addition, the most talented students are likely to be in high demand, and incentives such as scholarships and bursaries will be required to attract such students who are crucial for the skilled migration agenda. Some of the comparator countries are planning to increase the number of host country scholarships for such students at national level to help soften the blow of fees for the best students whilst reputations are built, but there is significant diversity at institutional level since most institutions are not set up to recruit non-EU/EEA fee-paying full-degree students. Currently, scholarships in most countries are targeted at few high-achieving students in particular subject areas (or from particular countries and regions) although as fees become the norm, an attractive student support package could make the difference in student decision-making. Therefore it is crucial that the Danish higher education adequately funds and promotes its student finance options at national and institutional level to prevent competitor countries recruiting the most talented students. It will also become increasingly important that national and institutional marketing activities are able to reinforce Denmark's reputation for a high quality educational experience and value for money.

5. IMMIGRATION AND VISA POLICIES AND EMPLOYMENT REGULATIONS

Most countries which recruit significant numbers of students from outside the EU/EEA have recently tightened their immigration requirements to ensure that only sufficiently qualified students that are able to support themselves financially during study are able to receive study visas. The comparator countries have all reviewed their immigration regulations to try to ensure a balance between monitoring student visas closely and not deterring students through complex immigration rules. In Germany non-EU/EEA applications are channelled through a national agency, whilst the Netherlands has different student entry policies for students from high-risk countries (e.g. China and Pakistan).

For international students who do not receive financial support, the opportunities for casual and permanent employment both during and after study are becoming an increasingly important aspect of their decision on where to study. EU/EEA students benefit from free movement policies, but variable policies and regulations exist for non-EU/EEA students on where they can study, where they can work, and how long they can live in different countries. Given the importance of casual work during studies and employment overseas after graduation (often to help repay study loans), it is important that national regulations related to work and immigration encourage students rather than act as a barrier to skilled migration.

The comparator countries have all engaged with this agenda through providing opportunities for skilled migration in specific employment fields, although in most of the comparator countries working during study can be more difficult because of national regulations. There are also issues with the availability of employment opportunities both during and after study in all countries mainly for language reasons. Denmark needs to continue to ensure that potential international students are aware of potential employment opportunities during and after study and to ensure that regulations are attractive and understandable to students who wish to become skilled migrants. Its nationally coordinated approach to immigration is very helpful in this regard and a move towards centralised applications for overseas students as in Germany and Sweden would also help to streamline the application process.

6. INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

International partnerships are becoming an important feature of international higher education - at both national and institutional levels - and provide an example of how increased competition is being balanced with a trend towards greater collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can help to foster increased mobility and economic competitiveness. There are a range of possible partnership models - including government to government cooperation agreements, multi-institutional networks, institution to institution partnership agreements and programme-level collaborations. Partnerships are often multi-dimensional and designed to help achieve a range of different strategic objectives related to research, teaching and knowledge transfer, but

also act as an important means of facilitating short-term and full-degree mobility. They can involve exchange agreements, joint provision (including twinning arrangements and joint or dual degrees) and in some cases full periods of study at overseas campuses or through collaborative arrangements with overseas partners (although this is less common).

All of the comparator countries have long experience of exchange partnerships within Europe (e.g. through the Erasmus programme) and are becoming increasingly involved in joint teaching provision through Erasmus Mundus and the EU-Atlantis scheme that are aimed at helping to recruit non-EU/EEA students. They are all also engaging in a range of government level partnerships with non-EU/EEA countries of particular interest in addition to their traditional regional links. At the institutional level, in some countries, there are restrictions on the types of partnerships that are permitted which means that most partnerships have been academically rather than economically motivated. However, there is growing recognition that studying in their home country could be attractive for some students, and some countries are actively encouraging the expansion of transnational education (i.e. provision by one country provided in another). Germany has a well established reputation in this area and has invested significant sums (via the DAAD) to support institutional transnational education (TNE) activities for both academic and financial reasons. German institutions are also engaging in TNE independently. The Netherlands is also beginning to encourage more institutions to become more active in this area through engaging in collaborative agreements and establishing international study centres. However, in Denmark and Sweden there is a greater focus on bilateral exchange agreements and national level cooperation agreements (e.g. in Asia, Nordic countries). The Danish HE sector will need to become more active in transnational education to complement its existing partnership activity to help provide potential students with more flexible and cost-effective ways of participating in Danish higher education.

7. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International student perceptions of their overall study experience are becoming very important in student decision-making on where to study, are easily shared through social networking sites and are often used as a proxy for quality. As Sweden, Germany and Denmark introduce tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students they are beginning to focus on improving services for international full-degree students to help improve the international reputation of their HE sector. Institutions in many European countries have limited experience of recruiting and supporting full-degree international students as they are set up for dealing with home students and exchange students. Thus, there have been some criticisms by international students of institutional practices in areas such as admissions, accommodation, student support and integration between home and international students. This is often because there has been limited centralised control of student support which has traditionally been left to individual faculties. However, quality assurance (QA) is a rapidly emerging issue as institutions and national governments seek to build and maintain their reputations for quality and value for money to help attract international students. So far limited attention has been paid to the international student experience on transnational programmes although this will become an important issue in the short to medium-term.

Australia is a world leader in QA for international education although the Netherlands provides a useful European model to emulate with its Code of Conduct and national level investment in improving the quality of student services. Some countries are planning to introduce such a Code that seeks to provide minimum standards for recruitment and support for international students.

All comparator countries intend that institutions will reinvest any additional revenue from non-EU/EEA tuition fees to improve educational quality and services and support for all students. The onus is very much placed on the institutions to ensure and improve quality. To this end many institutions and national agencies (including The Danish Agency for International Education) are seeking to benchmark the international student experience through participating in the i-graduate International Student Barometer benchmarking programme and through comparative audits of international activity.

It is important that The Danish Agency for International Education and the Danish HE sector takes QA for in-

ternational student experience as seriously as possible, since it is one of the key elements that contributes to a positive value for money reputation. This will require significant investment from both the national government and individual institutions. Developing specific fees for student support (as in Germany) could be an option worth considering although only if the services provided can be improved considerably.

8. CURRICULUM REFORM AND FOREIGN-LANGUAGE PROVISION

The Bologna reform agenda and the associated objectives of improving the attractiveness of European higher education to non-EU/EEA students have encouraged the four comparator countries to support institutions to engage with curricular reform. At the most basic level Bologna compatibility is an important means of improving inward and outward student mobility, whilst other measures such as the introduction of 1-year and 18-month Master's programmes, an increase in foreign-language provision and the development of shorter vocational programmes (e.g. Summer Schools and single modules) are attempts to gain competitive advantage in a highly competitive international student recruitment market.

Although highly Bologna compliant, the Danish higher education sector could learn a great deal from the Netherlands which has developed a wide range of internationally focused and vocational Master's programmes which are popular with international students. The innovative learning approaches used in institutions such as the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands are also popular with overseas students as are curricula that are focused on preparing students for employment in international companies. Germany also provides a good example of using its strong international reputation to develop internationally focused provision in key science and technology subjects. Other interesting initiatives include the growth of double degree programmes and international foundation courses for non-EU/EEA students and the development of Summer Schools (in Germany and the Netherlands) and shorter modules (in Sweden) to attract international students who wish to study abroad for less time. Danish institutions should follow these developments closely and assess their suitability for the Danish context.

There is evidence of a decline in short-term or credit mobility as part of degree programmes in all comparator countries, as the impact of the Bologna reforms and the increased cost of higher education makes it more difficult in terms of time and cost to travel abroad for short periods. The Danish HE sector needs to develop innovative approaches to help facilitate and improve the popularity of this type of mobility in the future, for example through integration of overseas study into degree programmes (as in Germany). In the long term, short-term mobility is likely to decline further so it will be important to support this type of mobility as much as possible (e.g. via financial support).