



1 **INPUT TO THE NORTH AMERICA STRATEGY 2012-2015**

2 ANSA and NUS Norway would like to thank the Ministry of Education and Research for the
3 opportunity to submit input to the North America Strategy 2012-2015.

4 We welcome the introduction of a North America strategy for the period 2012-2015. The student
5 organisations represent important stakeholders in this strategy, and we welcome the
6 membership of both ANSA and NUS Norway in the strategy.

7 The draft strategy addresses some important points when it comes to improving and extending
8 higher education cooperation between Norway, the US and Canada. However, we feel there
9 are areas that have been neglected or left out, and some areas that should be further stressed
10 or expanded. Some of these points have already been put to the Ministry in previous
11 correspondence.

12

13 **1. Student participation**

14 Student participation is dependent on mainly one issue, at least from the Norwegian side, and
15 that is student financing. At present, the State Educational Loan Fund does not support the first
16 year of bachelor degrees at most higher education institutions in the US, which in our opinion is
17 hindering student mobility to the US. It is worth noting that all Scandinavian countries, except
18 Norway, support the freshman year. The rationale is towards financing the degree, rather than
19 focusing on what might be overlapping knowledge. Furthermore, it is worth noting that also the
20 Baltic States, except Latvia, support the freshman year. ANSA and NUS Norway therefore
21 recommend that the State Educational Loan Funds guidelines are revised, so that financial
22 support for studies abroad is not linked to the GSU-list. This would, to a greater extent, ensure
23 that it is possible to prioritize and stimulate student mobility to certain geographical regions of
24 political importance.

25 There has been an increase in the number of commercial actors whose agreements with US
26 higher education institutions enable Norwegian students recruited by them to enroll in the
27 sophomore year. This enables students who want to study elsewhere than at one of the 65
28 institutions (of the total 3 900 higher education institutions in the US), where they are eligible for
29 the Supplementary Grant, to do so. This has led to an increase in the number of Norwegian
30 students studying at institutions such as Berkeley College New York and University of North
31 Dakota, where they enable Norwegian students to enroll in the sophomore year. Still, those who

32 wish to study at institutions not covered by the Supplementary Grant, or at institutions that do
33 not recognize the accomplished Norwegian upper secondary school as equivalent to the
34 freshman year of a US bachelor degree, are hindered to do so by the lack of funding for the
35 freshman year. Those who study at these institutions have to cover all costs for the freshman
36 year, including tuition fees and living costs, themselves. The result of this is higher barriers for
37 those wanting to study in the US, and less geographical spread of the students that are moving
38 across the Atlantic Ocean. The North America Strategy 2012-2015 should rather aim for a
39 better spread of the Norwegian students. It is worth noting that only a small minority of US
40 higher education institutions recognize the accomplished Norwegian upper secondary school as
41 equivalent to the freshman year of a US bachelor degree. Research by ANSA's information
42 centre for studies abroad shows a much higher interest in studies in the US and Canada than
43 the actual number of students in these countries. Improved funding for students in the US by re-
44 establishing the freshman year funding is likely to reduce this gap substantially.

45 The evaluation of the North America strategy refers to the modest increase in the numbers of
46 Norwegians studying in the US, and it mentions the recognition by some US higher education
47 institutions of the accomplished Norwegian upper secondary school as equivalent to the
48 freshman year of a US bachelor degree. ANSA and NUS Norway believe that, in order to
49 ascertain the true impact of these factors, they must be properly evaluated.

50 As for the goals for student mobility to and from Norway set by the Ministry for 2015, ANSA and
51 NUS Norway feel that these goals, and especially the goals set for bachelor degree students,
52 should be more ambitious than what is stated in the strategy. We recognize that the Ministry
53 wants to promote more student mobility at master's level, but do not agree that this aim should
54 come at the expense of mobility at bachelor level. As such, we feel that the aim of increasing
55 the number of Norwegian bachelor degree students in the US by a mere 25 students by 2015,
56 is much too low. Furthermore, we feel that the Ministry also should aim at increasing the
57 number of North American students at Norwegian institutions by more than 193 students as
58 stated in the strategy.

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60 **2. Regulation and quality assurance of commercial actors**

61 In recent years, the number of commercial agents acting as a go-between between the student
62 and the higher education institution has drastically increased. The role of commercial agents go
63 some way to explain the rise in the number of students studying at institutions that enable
64 students to enroll in Sophomore year, as this opportunity most often is a result of an agreement
65 between the agent and institution in question.

66 The role of commercial agents can therefore also to some degree explain the modest rise in the
67 number of Norwegian students particularly in the US. It is likely that commercial agents will play
68 an even bigger role in the US higher education market for Norwegians in the future, and ANSA
69 and NUS Norway are therefore concerned at the almost complete lack of regulation or quality
70 assurance of commercial agents. ANSA has produced a set of ethical guidelines that agents
71 must follow in order to be recommended by ANSA. However, ANSA of course has no way of
72 ensuring that students receive the service that they are entitled to. ANSA and NUS Norway
73 therefore call upon the Ministry to producing some regulations or measures of quality assurance

74 of commercial agents, and feel that this aim should also be included in the North America
75 strategy 2012-2015.

76 NUS Norway and ANSA would like to comment on the topic of increased joint degrees across
77 borders. Our organizations are generally positive to the increased international cooperation,
78 and our sentiments regarding the subject, are that the double learning possibilities gained from
79 joint degrees are overall positive. Despite the beneficial effects already mentioned, it is
80 important to recognize some of the problems concerning joint degrees. The focus must lie on
81 the importance of sufficient quality assurance standards and that international cooperation
82 should increase the quality of the subjects. Along the same lines, it is important that Norwegian
83 principles are not neglected. One of the main principles in the Norwegian educational system is
84 that all education is to be free of cost to the student. It is important to us that this also is
85 applicable to joint degrees to make them accessible to the general student-population.

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87 **3. Information**

88 Currently the information provided about studies in the US, Canada and Norway could be
89 improved. ANSA's information centre for studies abroad (consisting of 4,5 members of staff)
90 plays an important role when it comes to providing information about study opportunities in the
91 US, Canada and Norway. At the same time, we recognize that information about studies abroad
92 does not necessarily reach all those whom such information would benefit. We believe that
93 particularly SIU could play an important role in reaching out to pupils, not only international
94 offices at US, Canadian and Norwegian higher education institutions. ANSA's members can
95 also be used as ambassadors for studies in Norway, as could former or current American and
96 Canadian students in Norway.

97 NUS Norway and ANSA see the need to strengthen the educational counseling services at the
98 Norwegian upper-secondary/high school level in order to enable students to make informed
99 decisions about further studies in Norway and abroad. There is an average of one counselor
100 per 500 pupils at a high school in Norway, which we believe to be too low in order to secure
101 objective and high quality information about higher education.

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103 **4. Exchange programs**

104 NUS Norway and ANSA think that in order to increase the number of exchange students to the
105 US and Canada, Norwegian institutions must to a larger extent provide students with
106 preliminary approval of their combination of modules abroad before departure. The national
107 database for approval of foreign higher education (NAG) might be a tool that could help this
108 situation, and possibilities for purposeful use should therefore be explored. All barriers and
109 incentives that are hindering mobility of students to North America should be removed. It is
110 important that Norwegian institutions do not lose governmental subsidies in situations where
111 they are not able to fill the place of an outgoing exchange student with an incoming one. This is
112 particularly important for institutions in more rural areas of Norway, where the recruitment
113 amongst foreigners might be more challenging. It must be questioned whether today's system

114 creates a certain level of disincentives for some institutions against encouraging students to join
115 a student exchange program.

116

117 Yours sincerely,

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119 

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122 ANSA

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