



## Student Mobility and Internationalization

ISU has structured their suggestions following the dialogue from the student summit held in Oslo in November. Following are ISU's suggestions for actions and reflections on Internationalization, Student Mobility and growth in the area in Norwegian Higher Education.

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## **The role of students**

- International students should be encouraged to promote the university and country they come from. Word of mouth can prove effective to motivate students to go on exchange to institutions where partner agreements are in place.
- International Students and students that have been on exchange should be encouraged to talk about their experience on exchange honestly, include both downsides and upsides to it. Going on exchange can be difficult, but with keeping an open mind and challenging our comfort zones, real progress can occur. The stories from students are personal and will add a texture and feel to going on exchange that will motivate fellow students. These stories can be shared at a faculty level because the students from each faculty are more likely to have similar options of exchange.
- Incoming international students and students when returning to Norway should be encouraged to take an active role in the international student community at their home institution. This can be through volunteering for orientation activities at the beginning of semester, joining student organizations or running for the student parliament.

## **The role of institutions**

### **University Staff**

- Improve staff training on how to set students to an international mindset. There are staff that are engaged in internationalization but there are also many not interested or that do not see the importance of it.
- Identify and close the gap between the international office and the academic staff. Students have a feeling of running between the two being told to ask the other and not getting clear answers. Improve on that. International 'champions' should be identified in faculties to support international students and internationalization efforts.
- Lecturers should encourage going on exchange instead of discouraging it. Students have experienced some lecturers discourage internationalization.
- Rectors and university leadership in general need to keep a positive mind on internationalization and talk about it openly, as they determine the culture of the university as a whole. They have a responsibility to promote and invest in internationalization.

### **Language Barrier**

- Make language and cultural courses available to International students in order to break down the language barrier and motivate curiosity towards Norwegian language and society. All higher education institutions with a degree seeking international student population should aim to provide Norwegian language classes from levels A1-5.
- More programs and courses in English. It is also helpful that the English-taught courses are early in the semester, not just in the third year of a bachelor's or second year masters. The earlier you



expose and challenge students to break the language barrier, the more willing they are to take the challenge and go abroad.

### **Common interests/experiences**

- Create a platform for students to share their experiences on going abroad and how internationalization played a role in their decision, organized by faculty, and include both international students from partner universities and those Norwegian exchange students who are back in Norway. The platform should link students to each other depending on the relevance of the program and exchange choices.
- Stop holding events for students with an internationalization/integration aim. Find common interests among students, both foreigners and domestic, instead of separating them and creating barriers.

All Norwegian higher education institutions should aim to structure their internationalization efforts (recruitment, programs and research output) to meet global challenges for instance by adding integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into curriculum. This can be done with more interdisciplinary learning across multiple faculties, aiming to give students the skills to understand and skills to work towards the SDGs.

### **The role of the Ministry**

#### **Fees/Student permit**

- No tuition fees for international students and a decrease in the overall visa costs and financial barriers. An investment in international students is an investment in a future tax-paying international citizen in Norway. There should be balance in the perception that international students are a good investment regardless of them staying in Norway and join the labor market or go home and become 'ambassadors' for Norway. Also an investment in international students adds to the international environment in classes which again encourages Norwegian students to be curious on Internationalization at home and exchange.
- Design a student permit that more adequately meets the expectations of international students and is comparable to neighboring Scandinavian countries. This could include lowering the renewal cost of the student permit, which currently is the same fee when applying for the first time. Consider a permit which extends the length of a degree, instead of annually renewing.
- Review the 'proof of funds' process: Students should be able to submit a bank statement from their home country when applying for the student permit instead of having to transfer the funds to a university bank account. The current required annual amount rises to meet the lånekassen stipend. A new method of calculating annual living costs should be developed for international students, not tied to a stipend which rises annually and is politically advocated for by the National Union of Students in Norway (NSO).
- Some new international students experience discrimination when they get their student visa rejected in their first application because of where they come from, that they are not married, don't have children or are perceived to not have strong enough ties to their home country to go

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back. Those reasons should be irrelevant or the rule should be equally applied to international students from all nationalities to make sure it is not used to discriminate some students because of their nationality. It also sends a bad signal from Norway to international students that they are unwanted. By making it equal to all nationalities it will become difficult to recruit, seeing that students seldom are married, have children or have the required ties mentioned in this rule regardless of where they come from. ISU suggests that this reason for rejection of student visas is addressed with UDI to be removed.

### **Recruitment**

- Set ambitious goals for recruitment of international students as well as students going on exchange. Internationalization is a 2-way process of getting more international students in and more Norwegian students out. It will be very difficult for Norwegian Higher Education to reach a 50% quota of students going on exchange without drastic investment in recruitment of international students to Norway. Internationalization starts at home, and when Norwegian students are exposed to it early in their education they are more likely to go on exchange later in their education.
- Consider the political agenda towards the BRICS countries and how much this should have a hand in deciding where students go versus where they want to go. The labor market is the drive for the BRICS agenda but there are still other interests in student mobility besides rapid financial development. The ministry's list of "wished" international students' nationalities also limits where Norway can recruit from. If incentives were created related to SDG goals of where students should go, it'll bring a different motivation and interest in students. It would also make the variety of countries that are prioritized bigger and more diverse. The ministry also has to create a more open culture and communication for broad recruitment of international students and stop making barriers for certain nationalities with financial or discriminatory policies.
- Expanding the SDG goals around mobility creating a scholarship program which more closely links development links in specific countries and areas of specialization at Norwegian institutes. This will improve outcomes for linking incoming degree students and the goals of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For instance, identifying an institution which offers programs for disaster management to countries which are at risk from natural disasters. Via the diplomatic presence or sending education delegations to these countries, potential scholars can be identified and shortlisted for the scholarships. This would be a similar program to the Quota Scheme but can be more structured to meet targeted objectives. The MFA can work with its counterpart in the sending country to ensure a visa process in which the scholarship recipient returns to their home country for a certain period to ensure the knowledge is transferred or passed on.

### **Language barrier**

Make some English courses in programs mandatory. The percentage of students going on exchange in programs that are entirely in English is higher, because it breaks down the language barrier and gives the students a chance to test themselves before deciding on exchange programs.



## **Ambitious goals for Internationalization at home**

Going on exchange allows for interpersonal and intrapersonal development through the understanding and respect of other nations and cultures. It adds a global perspective to the student who has been abroad and has experienced other than local and national perspectives in their respective fields. However, students need more support from their home university to go on exchange. They require a more streamlined process on how to apply and the assurance that their courses will be taken into account once they are back home. In order for them to be willing to go on exchange, they need to be exposed to an international environment at home earlier in their education. Internationalization is a 2-way process that goes in hand with exchange, mutually dependent on each other. Investing in internationalization at home is the best way to ensure that the exchange quota goal is reached. Goals need to be set for international student recruitments, and investments need to go into internationalization at home. An analysis should also be made about how internationalization at home and exchange affect each other.

We thank you for the invitation to contribute to the whitepaper. If you would like to go more in depth with what you have read in this input, we will be glad to contribute further. You can email the National President at [Nationalpresident@isu-norway.no](mailto:Nationalpresident@isu-norway.no).

Best regards

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