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## Policy Paper on Mobility and Internationalisation of Higher Education

### 1. Introduction

#### **Internationalisation – a chance**

Internationalisation is a chance for acquiring intercultural competence and understanding, as well as democracy values and skills and language competences; both needed in the globalised world and the key for development of a society where everyone can live together peacefully. Solidarity, responsibility, diversity and cooperation should be the main concerns in the development of an international environment both within higher education systems and in the European Higher Education Area. Promoting quality within internationalisation should be the key to facilitating a comprehensive approach to internationalisation. As students, we have the right to actively participate, voice our opinions and be a part of the processes and decisions made concerning the internationalisation of higher education institutions, shaping the multicultural future we will be living in.

#### **Internationalisation – a reality**

Internationalisation has become a must in every higher education institution across the globe. It can be seen as a means to be recognized and compete on the global level, but just as well as an outcome of a globalised world, where graduates are expected to master skills to work in a multicultural, multilingual and international environment. When economic reasons steer the internationalisation of higher education with the objective of making profit, higher education institutions focus on attracting fee-paying students and establishing offshore campuses and franchises. The risk is that only economically exploitable programmes prosper and certain countries or regions stay in the focus of interest at the expense of quality in education and the rights' of students.

Mobility, likewise, can be seen both as a means to and as an outcome of internationalisation. The numbers of mobile students continue to increase both for short and long-term mobility. However, the mobile student population remains an elitist group; mobility being a privilege of

a few. Internationalisation must be seen as an encompassing process and be of a benefit for everyone and not a profit for the few, neither within a country, nor between them. The equality of possibilities should be ensured within the processes of internationalisation in higher education institutions, taking into account the specific needs of students from different backgrounds.

## **2. Student mobility**

ESU believes that mobility is a right for all students. Mobility should be seen holistically, as a three phase process: firstly, the purpose of mobility has to be understood, valued, and promoted, both on national and institutional level. This includes allocating sufficient resources to provide all the necessary information for the students. Furthermore to provide language training and other skills required by students. The integration and involvement of mobile students must be ensured within the higher education community, and thirdly, the skills gained abroad and brought by international students should be recognised and encompassed within the institution.

ESU demands that possibilities for mobility be offered during first, second and third cycle, whether in the form of an exchange, mobility periods or short-term course. The quality of internships must be ensured, with adequate supervision included. Students should be included in the administration of mobility programmes, the designing of new programmes, and the development of existing programmes and new initiatives. The expertise students gain from having spent time abroad should be taken into account in the design, development and implementation of the programmes. Student feedback should be used to improve the quality of mobility periods and provide a reference point for students considering going abroad.

### **Access**

ESU demands equal chances and access to knowledge and education for all, based on personal interest and capacity. This also includes student mobility. The mobile student population should reflect the diversity of the population. Governments and higher education institutions should conduct evidence-based research on the barriers non-mobile and underrepresented groups face. In order to make mobility a real opportunity of development for all, and not only for a limited segment of society, governments and higher education institutions need to ensure widening access to all, along with a comprehensive approach to dismantling existing barriers to mobility.

In order to increase the participation of underrepresented student groups, namely students with disabilities, students with families, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, adequate support measures and resources must be put in place. Mobility windows must be in present at all cycles and study fields in order to allow for students to spend time abroad, but not be limited strictly to only one chance of going abroad. However, no disadvantages should result for individuals whom, for whatever reason, are not mobile.

Measures must be taken to guarantee the reintegration of students returning from a stay abroad, including the provision of study guidance.

### **Student Support Services**

All students, regardless of the length of the stay, must be guaranteed equal access to the student support services of the hosting countries and institutions, such as health care and child care services. The specific needs of students with disabilities must be taken into account by governments, higher education institutions and student unions, as lack of support for disabled students during the stay abroad creates a barrier to participation. The needs of international students should be catered for by ensuring that staff have relevant expertise and language skills to provide such services.

Governments, higher education institutions and municipalities must take specific measures in order to guarantee low-cost, quality accommodation for incoming students so that housing does not become a barrier to accessing or starting one's studies. The three parties should ensure that reasonable funding is provided for student housing in order to meet the housing demands caused by internationalisation. Integrated living with domestic students and/or other citizens is a prerequisite for the integration of international students and should thus be provided accordingly.

### **The role of languages in learning and teaching**

Learning through another language than the student's mother tongue makes mobility an academically and culturally enriching experience, contributing to better integration in the hosting institution and country and to students becoming responsible European and global citizens. The resources for continuous and tuition-free language courses of the destination country must be ensured by higher education institutions, and if necessary by national governments.

Free of charge language courses should be provided at the home institution prior to the mobility period to secure a sufficiently high level of both general and academic language knowledge to learn through a given language. The design of student mobility curriculums should integrate linguistic and intercultural communication skills by encouraging students to enrol in courses not only in English, but also in the local language of the hosting institution. In the event that language courses of the destination country are not offered for free, these should be paid for by the student's home institution. Language courses of the destination country should be a requirement for higher education institutions before an exchange partnership is recognised. A good practice of including additional modules of other European languages than the student's mother tongues in the curriculum of the first cycle degrees will foster the internationalisation of studies and support the construction of a European identity. Institutions' multilingualism policies should be shaped by the presence of the following pillars: addressing students' knowledge and competences, providing self-accessible materials, addressing students' needs and capabilities needed to actively participate in society. Learning and teaching in languages other than the student's mother tongue should be supplemented by

emphasising academic language and intercultural communication provision. A clear rationale behind running the programme by institution is needed. Aforementioned being the case, languages become a catalyst of change within the institution's internationalisation framework. Language courses are to be offered to both exchange students and degree-seeking students. Language courses for international degree-seeking students must be provided to such an extent that will enable full participation in society. Where possible, domestic language courses should be a part of international programmes. These courses must be free of charge. Special attention must be paid to providing preparatory language courses for immigrants to access higher education, as well as providing continuous access to domestic language courses throughout their studies, free of charge. When it comes to the assessment of language skills and competence in higher education, existing measures should be supplemented by measures assessing students' knowledge of their specific subject area in order to provide a more genuine outline of language learning outcomes.

### **Information provision**

A prerequisite for making an informed choice of study destination is the transparent and comprehensive provision of information on the rights of mobile students, as guaranteed by the European Union. Equal and balanced information provision from and for all parts of the EHEA should be provided. ESU stresses that the marketing of study programmes, research and labour opportunities must be factual and not for profit seeking purposes. Rather than prioritising the marketing or recruiting processes, priority should be given to improving the conditions for applicants and the quality and availability of information on study programmes and opportunities. Student unions, higher education institutions, career centres and/or employment offices should assist international students with offering career counselling and provide information on employment opportunities, legal rights and duties.

Documents required for participating in institutional governance and student self-governing structures should be provided in one or more languages accessible for all students both domestic and international. In addition, it is recommendable that the actual participation of international students is enabled in these student self-governing structures.

### **Visa and permit procedures**

Bureaucracy and inconsistency in the provision of student visas and residency permits constitute barriers for both short and long-term mobility and for the integration and employment opportunities of international and mobile students. The rules and regulations for obtaining an entry permit and maintaining a student visa must be made more coherent throughout EHEA, and discriminatory requirements and procedures must be removed. There should be no fees in place for students to apply for or maintain a student visa, and applicants for visa and residency permits should be informed of the decision on their application within 30 days, at the latest. In addition, visa and resident permits should not need to be renewed each year, resulting in unnecessary red tape, bureaucracy and financial challenges. Instead, visa and resident permits need to be granted for the whole duration of the study programme.

International students should have the right to obtain a permit allowing them to work as much time as any domestic student. Regardless of their employment status, third-country students should maintain the same rights as nationals within that country with respect to the access to and supply of goods and services made available to the public. Obtaining a visa must not hinder the entry of international students into the country. No biased evaluation of applications from third-country citizens who want to pursue higher education in Europe can be considered as grounds for refusing to issue student residence permits or respective visas. Only accredited institutions of higher education should be considered competent to evaluate the capacity of a non-European student to fulfil their studies for the purposes of immigration. The conditions for residency should be flexible, with the residency permit lasting for at least 12 months after graduation, in order for the graduate to have a realistic possibility of finding employment in the host country. Individuals who have completed a tertiary education degree in the host country, and have had full-time employment for at least 2 years shall be eligible for a permanent residency permit.

### **Recognition**

Barriers such as the full recognition of degrees, qualifications and credits completed abroad continue to affect mobility. For free movement and mobility to benefit everyone and the internationalisation of higher education institutions, barriers to recognition must be dismantled. Higher education institutions should ensure students a fair recognition process, respecting the learning agreements made and providing guidance and support in the process of selecting a study destination and programme, as well as during the period the student spends abroad.

The recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications from within the EHEA as well as from non-EHEA countries plays a central role in facilitating access to the second and third cycle. Countries within EHEA should work towards coherent and regulated procedures for recognition of foreign diplomas and professions free of charge, and provide transparent information about the recognition process and decision-making within it. A procedure for appealing the decision must be in place.

### **Financing of mobility**

One of the core reasons for the exclusivity of mobility periods is the insufficient funding for students. Financing remains the number one deterrent for students to be mobile, especially affecting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Grants should be the main basis for support, both for short- and long-term mobility, and these are the responsibility of the sending country.

While the portability of grants and loans should be the first priority, destination institutions should be encouraged to devise scholarship schemes for international students. These scholarships should be offered based on need, not merit. On the European level, funding for education within the Multi-Annual Financial Framework should be increased so that the

funding allows for a realistic realisation of the set goals. This entails promoting and supporting individual mobility, providing capacity building opportunities for all levels and stakeholders involved in education and safeguarding of the functioning of international organisations.

Within the Erasmus+ Programme, targeted grants should be offered to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and other underrepresented groups to widen participation. Erasmus+ grants should be adjusted to cover the study and living costs of the destination country. The national agencies are responsible for the implementation of this adjustment. Grants should be topped with structural and institutional financing and be provided to ensure that no barriers are created at any point of the mobility period. The nation states and institutions are responsible for providing portable grants and loans in order to foster free movement and accessibility to mobility. Financial support for mobility should be a universal right and not based on merit or parental income of the student.

### **International students**

ESU believes in the importance of treating people in terms of their personal capacity, rather than in terms of their economic potential, attainment or contribution. Therefore, ESU rejects the idea of tuition fees for international students, as it is a form of discrimination based on the country of origin and economic outlook. Tuition fees for international students drastically limit the accessibility of higher education for non-EU/EEA students, robbing students from lower socio-economic backgrounds of the possibility of studying abroad and of social mobility. Tuition fees for international students should not be seen as a way to finance the higher education system, using individuals as cash cows of the higher education system. Fees for admissions exams, applications and language tests mandatory to international mobility should be removed.

Scholarships based on need should be offered for non-EU students with the aim to widen access for students from all backgrounds. In the case where the social support system does not cover for sudden and urgent costs that have risen, emergency funds should be in place and guaranteed by the governments.

It is crucial that all students have a voice in student representation. Therefore international students, whether exchange students or degree students, must have the right and possibility to participate in student representation. This must be actively facilitated by the students' unions.

### **3. Internationalisation at home**

Creating an international environment is crucial in order to benefit from all aspects of internationalisation. Not everyone has the possibility to study abroad for a diverse number of reasons. In order to assure the international character of studies for everyone, as well as the general quality of teaching, learning and research, each university should pay careful attention

to creating an international environment at their institution. Every student must have the chance to be part of internationalisation. To ensure that, there has to be free language classes provided at higher education institutions. To ensure the sustainability and quality of internationalisation, it should be seen as a crosscutting theme and included in the curricula and learning outcomes for students. Moreover the diversity of curricula in foreign languages should be designed and offered not only to incoming full or credit mobility students, but also domestic students. Institutions should ensure full integration of incoming and domestic students. This process of creating an international environment should be characterised by student participation. For internationalisation at home to be successful, it should not only be a crosscutting theme for teachers and the management of the higher education institution, but for all stakeholders.

### **Internationalisation Strategies**

In order to ensure an inclusive and holistic approach and demonstrate the value of internationalisation, each higher education institution should have a proper internationalisation strategy in place. It should state the institution's goals in terms of internationality, how these goals will be achieved, how the implementation will be monitored and evaluated and what the value of internationality is for the institution. Sufficient resources should be allocated to achieve these goals, with financial support given from the national level. Students must be part of planning, executing and evaluating the internationalisation strategies. National governments are encouraged to promote and support the internationalisation of higher education institutions by means of national internationalisation strategies.

#### **On the staff level**

Higher education institutions must hire international teaching and research staff in order to provide a wider perspective on the subjects thought. Knowledge and experiences acquired abroad by students and staff must be integrated upon return to the home institution. Mobility for staff should be promoted and valued as it contributes to a more international outlook within the institution, providing staff with relevant skills and experience needed for internationalisation at home and creating opportunities for further international cooperation for the students and institution. Higher education institutions must ensure and implement proper measures so that staff teaching in international programmes and/or courses have the sufficient language, pedagogical and multicultural skills to ensure the quality of the courses and programmes.

#### **On the administrative level**

On the administrative level, all staff should be trained to work in an intercultural environment with mobile staff and students, enabling the full inclusion of all students in the day-to-day activities of the higher education institution. Additionally, each higher education institution should have a specific office for internationalisation, appointed to plan and oversee internationalisation processes and procedures tied to it.

### **In research**

Resources from all over the world are essential for the quality of research outcomes. Therefore, each university should participate in making all research and educational resources open and freely available, for example by publishing in open-access journals. Internationally conducted research should be included in the curricula and teaching to enhance the learning experience of students in relevant fields.

## **4. Wider effects and long term consequences of internationalisation**

### **Balanced mobility**

ESU stresses the importance of balanced mobility flows within Europe. With student mobility being one of the main tools for European integration, mobility should benefit the different regions equally, without causing brain drain. Special attention needs to be paid to balancing the mobility flows by improving the quality of education in the countries with high levels of brain drain.

Solidarity among countries and institutions should rather be used as a tool for a better resolution of the gaps existing within the European Higher Education Area. Bilateral co-operation between institutions and governments from the different regions should be reinforced by the structures of the Bologna Process and through concrete measures such as the mobility treaty. ESU stresses the importance of balanced mobility, in terms of movement, field of study, research and labour affected by such mobility.

### **Mobility Treaty**

To meet the demands caused by unbalanced mobility flows, new forms of support measures for mobility in the case of substantial economic differences between home and host country must be developed and tested, with the aim of providing equal opportunities to students within Europe. A mobility treaty should aim to balance mobility flows by compensating the cost of one's studies and hence prevent the restrictions for free movement and access to higher education. Such a treaty between states would include the idea that the country of origin is to fund a part of the effective cost of the students' studies abroad, while taking the financial situation of those countries into account. In addition, such a system can be used to steer mobility flows toward more regionally balanced mobility.

### **Brain Drain**

ESU identifies "brain drain" as the process whereby a country loses its most talented and educated people to other countries due to the lack of opportunities in their home country. Incidentally, brain gain can be seen as an effective way of bringing in different perspectives and stimulating the educated sectors of a country's population. This process, if unbalanced,

can have a significant negative impact on the social, economic and structural development of the sending country and in this respect on Europe as a whole, with the consequences showing as a loss in intellectual contribution to society, particularly in terms of democratic and nation-building efforts and the attainment of development goals.

ESU strongly opposes countries and higher education institutions aggressively recruiting talented students, researchers or graduates of another country for the sake of increasing its own competitiveness and economic prosperity and creating elite institutions. This unbalanced and systematic removal of the most talented people is highly reprehensible and compounds the effects of brain drain. The loss of a large number of skilled individuals has negative effects in terms of desired qualitative and sustainable development of education, particularly where there is a loss of teaching staff or researchers from particular areas. Positive measures should be adopted in order to provide incentives for students to remain in their countries where brain drain is a problem.

### **Transnational education**

Through increased demand for education, the establishment of franchises, offshore campuses, twinning and joint degree programmes is ever more frequent. Transnational education should not be used for branding higher education institutions or seeking profit from such arrangements. Instead, transnational education should benefit the local community and the learning environment by providing students with opportunities for quality assured education, free of charge. ESU is strongly opposed to the marketisation and commodification of higher education and stresses that students' rights must remain at the core of the internationalisation process.

### **Joint Degrees**

Joint and double degrees need to be held accountable by all participating countries and follow national regulation. Higher education institutions should therefore be legally banned from receiving income from fees charged through the programme consortiums. Students should not be subject to paying fees in countries where no fees are in place. All courses offered through joint degrees programmes should be accredited by one or all hosting countries in accordance with all regular quality standards. The provision of transparent information on available grants and costs of the degree must be ensured in the marketing of joint degree programmes and especially the Erasmus+ Grants for Joint Master Courses.