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Platform on internationalisation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation is a source of solidarity, societal interest, new impulses and cultural exchange across borders. Investment in internationalisation is not a luxury, nor is it a sign of superfluous resources. Rather, it is essential in a globalised world – especially within research and education.

NSO believes that education must be seen as a human right, not a commodity. Equal opportunity in education is a premise for a just society, and access and diversity are the linchpins of a modern educational system.

Increased globalisation means that our challenges as students are more closely related to fellow students in other countries, now more than ever. Therefore, global solidarity among students is a decisive factor.

NSO defines internationalisation of higher education in terms of how national authorities and education institutions at all levels meet the challenges and opportunities which come in the wake of increased globalisation. Internationalisation of the entire educational pathway makes it possible to increase dissemination of knowledge, academic development and innovation in a global community. A global knowledge community can help to solve humanity's challenges and create increased prosperity in our society. It also puts Norwegian students in a better position to deal with globalised employment markets and academic environments, by giving them necessary cultural and academic skills.

Higher education in Norway should be internationally-oriented, research based and relevant to society. A well-functioning academia involves being able to do research, express opinions and join organisations freely, for both academic staff and students. Consequently, NSO supports academic freedom and freedom of expression also outside of Norway.

2. INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC PROCESSES

To ensure high quality in knowledge development, higher education and research in Norway must link up with international networks. It must also utilise knowledge gained from global academia, to deliver relevant and useful contributions to society. International organisations and processes should aim to genuinely assist equal rights in education, and work to promote the economic, academic and social rights of students.

2.1 The conditions for supranational processes

Every supranational process within higher education that Norway participates in must be based on an integrated approach to the function and role of education. This includes:

- Academic freedom for both students and academic staff.

- Funding for education is a public responsibility.
- Preparation for future employment.
- Preparation for active citizenship in a democratic society.
- Equal rights and opportunities to start and complete higher education.
- Personal development and progress.
- The maintenance and development of an advanced, extensive and diverse knowledge base.

The Norwegian higher education system must appreciate its international obligations, and should be at the forefront in fulfilling them. The fulfilment of obligations must be adapted to the Norwegian context. Work connected to supranational structures must be carried out by democratic and representative bodies. Student participation must be formalised in order for a process to be considered legitimate.

Academic freedom must be protected and a high ethical standard maintained throughout all processes.

2.2 Educational policy processes and bodies

2.2.1 European Higher Education Area – EHEA

EHEA's primary goal is to have joint systems for higher education at the European level, which make it easy to study across national borders. In addition, the authorities and other relevant parties will find it easier to understand how higher education functions in other countries, making it possible for them to evaluate higher education there. Openness and transparency across national borders in the EHEA is a basic condition for collaboration and trust in each other's educational systems. EHEA shall help to develop joint solutions and goals within the following areas: the degree system, quality assurance, recognition, lifelong learning, mobility, relevance and diversity.

NSO believes that all of the work of the EHEA should be based on Student Centred Learning (SCL). Therefore, it is important to NSO that the Norwegian government fight for this point-of-view through all EHEA work and projects. NSO expects the Norwegian government to promote the importance of collaboration within EHEA. All member countries must prioritise EHEA if it is to function as a joint project. NSO expects the Norwegian government to lead by example in including national student unions in debates, and to be perceptive to student opinion, and to expect the same of other member countries.

While EHEA's partners¹ are important, both for process progression in the EHEA and for debate concerning the different areas, it is nevertheless crucial that decisions are made by member countries, at the *Ministerial Conference*.

¹ ESU, EUA, EURASHE, ENQA, EI, EU, CoE, Business Europe

It is important for the legitimacy of the EHEA that agreements are drawn up, with penalties for member countries which fall too far behind in the implementation of joint solutions, or who fail to show willingness to adopt these solutions.

2.2.2 Rankings

Rankings that are based on the selection and emphasis of a few quantitative parameters, with little or no real connection to the quality of education at institutions, should not be recognised as tools for evaluating and comparing institutions. They should not be used to control the education sector either. NSO believes that we must continue to develop more qualitative indicators. Indicators should be used to assist quality development at institutions. Diversity, equal opportunity and social responsibility should be included as indicators.

2.2.3 The European Union (EU) and the European Commission

The EU has been an important supporter of the Bologna Process. NSO believes that the EU should continue to focus on supporting the Bologna Process, instead of developing its own higher education policy.

The EU should support and accommodate nation states and the processes that have been negotiated between them. The EU can make a positive contribution towards the attainment of Bologna Process goals, through its Framework Programme for Research and Mobility Programme for Education.

Participation in European research projects, such as the eighth Framework Programme of the EU, Horizon 2020, is important for the development of knowledge in Norway. NSO supports measures such as thematic prioritising, requirement for Open Access publishing and the emphasis on gender balance.

2.2.4 Erasmus+

The Erasmus Programmes have been the most important economic aids for connecting education systems in Europe together. The absence of tuition fees and the allocation of grants for Erasmus students, is crucial for mobility, especially in countries where students do not receive student financing or financial support to pay tuition fees to study abroad. Norway and the Norwegian higher education institutions must make better arrangements to allow Norwegian students to benefit from the Programme, especially with regard to practical training periods abroad.

The Erasmus+ grant should be adjusted to suit the host country, not the home country as previously practiced. The Erasmus+ grant should be sufficient to cover all expenses incurred during the stay. Erasmus+ Master Degree Loans should be changed to grants, to assist increased mobility. In principle, NSO is opposed to any scheme which contributes to increasing the debt of students in Europe. The support offered by Erasmus+ to student organisations should be altered, so that it gives the European Students' Union both an increase in funding and funding over the long-term.

After 2020, institutions should be required to fulfil minimum standards in the EHEA to be allowed to participate in a continuation of Erasmus+.

2.2.5 Practical Training Mobility

Periods of training abroad should also be approved for professional degrees requiring practical training. All students who carry out obligatory practical training outside of Norway should be given study credits and have the right to receive grants, as long as the higher education institution has given the place of training approval.

Students who take degrees which do not require practical training should, all the same, be encouraged to carry out practical training abroad. If it is not possible to include a period of practical training abroad in the degree, institutions should grant leave for those students.

Higher education institutions have a duty to inform their students about the practical training opportunities available. The administrative procedures surrounding practical training abroad must be simplified.

2.2.6 OECD

Norway should make use of the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) analytical expertise, to get a basis for comparison.

3. COMMERCIALISATION AND THE USE OF EDUCATION AS A COMMODITY

In the opinion of NSO, education is not a commodity and students are not a means to gain profit. Institutions that are not publicly funded should be organised in a way that prevents owners from achieving financial gains by redistributing the proceeds from the institution's activities and capital. Education must be protected against commercialisation and financial motives. NSO opposes international trading agreements which treat education as a profitable commodity.

3.1 Branch campuses

Parent institutions may have campuses in other countries, known as branch campuses. NSO finds this development problematic because it creates ambiguity in relation to legislation, responsibility for quality assurance and employment conditions. Norwegian higher education institutions should not be permitted to establish campuses abroad, and it should not be possible for non-Norwegian institutions to establish campuses in Norway.

NSO does not consider study programmes that are under the direction of Norwegian institutions abroad, with no connection to a national institution in the host country, to be examples of internationalised education.

Tuition fees should not be charged for these types of courses, and they must be subject to Norwegian laws and guidelines for supervision.

4. EQUAL RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO INTERNATIONALISED EDUCATION

Diversity in the mobile student population increases the societal advantage of internationalisation; interaction with international students is of benefit to the student population as a whole.

Mobility must reflect the student population and the general population. NSO is therefore opposed to programmes and attempts to make internationalised education and mobility into even more of an elitist phenomenon.

An integrated approach to mobility throughout the education system, from primary school to higher education, is necessary to achieve the goal of sending more students abroad on exchange programmes. Counselling is also required. Therefore, it is necessary to give more public funding to publicity which promotes exchange programmes. NSO demands that a national strategy for internationalisation is developed.

There need to be good support schemes for students with disabilities. The host institution or country has the primary responsibility for these schemes, and the students must be better informed about them.

5. MOBILITY

Genuine internationalisation must be founded on the idea of exchange, of both people and ideas. Mobility contributes to internationalisation within higher education, by creating the right conditions for interaction between students, researchers and academic environments. Appreciation of other points of view and academic approaches must be experienced if they are to be fully understood. Mobility gives mutual social benefits for both the home country and the host country. A country benefits from both the students who stay in the host country and those who travel to other places. It is an advantage for Norway that other people's international competence also includes competence about us. International academic interaction creates quality in education and increases the benefits to society.

At the same time, studying abroad also results in a great deal of informal learning. Adapting to other systems, cultures and practices are all examples of international competence which is built up independently of the course of study. To get the most out of student exchange, students should be offered courses in intercultural competence both before and after their stay abroad.

NSO believes it should be a national goal to send at least 30% of Norwegian students on exchange programmes. Therefore, institutions need to develop strategies to increase the annual percentage of students they send on exchange programmes. Arrangements should also be made to allow more students to take longer periods of exchange, or even entire degrees abroad. One measure to increase the international experience of students is to accredit only those courses which contain at least one qualified exchange agreement.

It is NSO's opinion that institutions are obligated to give students good opportunities to participate in exchange programmes. Where possible, students should be given the chance to take free study credits abroad.

Exchange periods of less than three months duration should be accounted for in an individual statistic and should result in some degree of credit in the funding system.

One of the goals of student mobility should be to maintain a balanced flow of students. The following forms of balance should be aimed at:

- Macro-balance: The total number of students sent versus the number received.
- Regional balance: The destinations Norwegian students travel to and the places where we collaborate on education and research in the world.
- Bi-lateral balance: The number of students sent versus the number received from a specific country.
- Diversity in mobility: The mobile student population should reflect the general population.

NSO believes it is important to have bi-lateral collaboration with strategic partner countries, to ensure access to knowledge and competence. This contributes to increased internationalisation, quality and relevance in Norwegian education and research.

At the same time, NSO considers that education is one of the most important political tools that we have for development and foreign aid. Norway should fund education and accommodation through the foreign aid budget, by offering mobility grants for students from the Global South. Through studying in Norway, students can learn the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out development in their home countries. Breadth and variation increase the value of student mobility by creating new perspectives.

There should be a connection between programmes which receive funding and programmes which are approved in retrospect. Foreign degrees should be approved in Norway if there are no significant differences between the foreign degree and its equivalent in Norway. In some cases, it may be practical to offer a supplementary course in order to get the foreign degree approved.

Better arrangements must be made to assist students to benefit from other exchange opportunities, such as 'Free movers'², in addition to the formal schemes already on offer at higher education institutions. Balanced mobility divides the costs equally between countries. The Nordic mobility agreement, in which the sending country partially funds the course places for its students, is a good secondary solution, where mobility is a-symmetrical. Norway should enter into similar agreements with countries to which we are structurally-dependent on sending students to.

² 'Free Movers' allows international students to study for one or two terms at an institution without being part of an official exchange programme or agreement.

5.1 Financial support for Norwegian students abroad

To receive study grants and loans from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund, applicants must be connected to Norway. The receipt of study grants before the connection was established, from the Loan Fund or other bodies,³ should not exclude one from having access to financial support.

The rules for allocation of grants and loans for education abroad must be more flexible. Using a higher education institution's ranking as a basis for allocation of grants and loans must cease immediately.

5.1.1 Tuition fees abroad

For NSO, the principle of free education is universal. No country should charge tuition fees or application fees, regardless of students' nationalities or backgrounds. To protect this principle in Norway, it is important to support other countries' and student unions' battle against tuition fees, through participation in global campaigns.

In the meantime, the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund should give students a 70% tuition grant for both bachelor's and master's degrees abroad. Norway and the Norwegian Centre for International Co-operation in Education (SIU) should lead the way with the principle of free education, in their educational collaboration with other countries.

6. THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AT NORWEGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The most important participants in internationalisation in higher education in Norway are the institutions themselves. It is here that the main emphasis on working to implement internationalisation must lie. The institutions' efforts in relation to internationalisation must pay equal attention to contacts abroad as on international students and academic staff who come to Norway. It is still a minority of Norwegian students who participate in exchange. Therefore, it is necessary for Norwegian institutions to be aware of their responsibility and work towards a high level of internationalisation for Norwegian students.

6.1 Co-operation between institutions

Universities and university colleges must work strategically for promote co-operation and link up international research and education. The *UTFORSK* Partnership Programme provides a means to achieve this and should be strengthened. All academic environments should aim for the goal of all study programmes offering at least one exchange scheme approved in advance by 2020.

³ https://www.lanekassen.no/Global/Forskrifter/2014/201302034-4%20Forskrift%20om%20tildeling%20av%20utdanningsst%C3%B8tte%20for%20undervisnings%C3%A5ret%202014-2015%20OPPDA%20307556_1_1.PDF

6.1.1 Partnership

Partnership is a closer form of co-operation between institutions. It consists of both research and educational co-operation, combined with both student and researcher mobility. Student advisers should have a good knowledge of partner institutions' profiles and selection of courses. In terms of administration, it should be just as easy for a student to study a subject at a partner institution as at their home institution. Grades earned at partner institutions should also be printed on the grade certificate. Higher education institutions must make arrangements to ensure that students who participate in exchange schemes have an approval in advance right to study subjects at the partner institution.

The choice of strategic partners and the number of partnerships must be based on the institution's own ability to maintain and develop partnerships, using these to further develop their study programmes and research. Students should participate in the partnership selection process and throughout the period of co-operation. Student representatives at partner institutions should be represented in bodies that carry out co-operative work with partners. Students must also participate in decision-making bodies at partner institutions.

Norwegian higher education institutions must demand that their partner institutions are autonomous, hold and respect student elections, and permit students to demonstrate on campus.

NSO believes that joint degrees formalise co-operation and provide a safe and predictable opportunity for students to gain international experience. More joint degrees should be established, on the condition that they are subject to the principle of free education. Norwegian students who take joint degrees shall not pay tuition fees, and nor shall international students pay tuition fees for the part of the degree that is completed in Norway.

Joint degrees of satisfactory quality can be achieved by: creating mutual and stable funding arrangements; by using transparent forms of institutional co-operation; and establishing dual degrees and common term periods where suitable.

6.1.2 The Knowledge Triangle

Institutions should aim at and try to involve the entire Knowledge Triangle⁴ in their efforts at internationalisation. Relevant public bodies, businesses and organisations should become involved, contributing constructively to the content, practices and application of courses. This should be a requirement for Norwegian government-owned companies which carry out operations abroad.

6.1.3 Mobility of staff and research co-operation

Norwegian higher education institutions continually develop co-operative research with institutions abroad. This form of co-operation should also lead to increased mobility for academic staff. Work must be done to ensure that all academic staff are able to carry out

⁴ The 'Knowledge Triangle' consists of close links between education, research and innovation, and is an important aspect of the EU's Europe 2020 Strategy.

exchange several times throughout the duration of their careers. NSO believes that co-operation on research and exchange should include students alongside academic staff.

6.2 Inclusion of international students

For Norwegian students who do not participate in exchange programmes themselves, meeting international students at home is an important contribution to their own internationalisation. If contact between Norwegian and foreign students is to contribute to academic, cultural and social exchange, it is crucial that foreign students in Norway are fully integrated into the study environment. It is important that the institutions' efforts at inclusion take into account the diversity of the international student population, making arrangements for inclusion regardless of the ethnicity, language, religion, ideology, sexual orientation, disability, social background, gender identity and gender expression of students.

Institutions must contribute to academic inclusion, helping to promote participation by adapting teaching plans, offering mentor schemes, discussion groups and group work.

Institutions must also make arrangements to help include international students in the social side of student life. For example, by giving financial support to organisations and student associations which actively work towards the inclusion of international students, by offering multilingual and internationally-oriented activities.

Furthermore, the institutions must offer counselling tailored to the needs of international students, and organise start of term activities which ensure good contact between Norwegian and international students. These activities should also be offered to master's degree students.

Institutions must encourage international students to participate in democratic processes and bodies, quality assurance and course development. Translation should be offered, with assistance from the institution where necessary.

6.3 International courses and programmes

Norwegian institutions should develop at least one study programme in a language other than Norwegian (not including language studies), at both bachelor's and master's degree level. This should contribute to a better, more firmly-rooted internationalisation of Norwegian institutions and academic environments. Experience from Finland shows that there is especially great demand for study programmes in English at bachelor's degree level.

6.3.1 Language

Norwegian higher education institutions are free to choose their own language policy. This means that they can choose to give English and Norwegian equal status as working languages. Regardless of the language policy of the institution, important information should be made available in both Norwegian and English.

All universities and university colleges must offer Norwegian language courses, free-of-charge, as well as courses in academic culture, to all international students and staff. Norwegian language skills are vitally important for the integration of students and staff, and

help to increase the spread of knowledge, create better cultural and social dissemination and lay the foundation for staying on in Norway after graduation.

In all subjects students should be able to sit their exams in English.

6.3.2 Language for exchange students

The language courses on offer for exchange students today are not adequate. The geographical spread must be widened, with the aim of offering summer courses at more higher education institutions in Norway. As part of the same goal, more institutions must hold the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

6.3.3 Residency permits and employment opportunities

International students should be granted a working visa automatically along with their student visa, as long as they are able to show that they are active students. International students should have the same opportunity as Norwegian students to work part-time while studying. The clarification process for the financial situation of students who come from countries outside the EU and EEA (The European Economic Area), needs to be simplified and made clearer.

NSO believes that the rules for the renewal of visas should be changed, so that a visa may be granted for longer periods based on income flow, as opposed to available funds at a given point in time. Students and staff who come to Norway for a shorter period of exchange should have their applications for residency permits processed quickly.

To attract more international students to Norway from countries outside the EEA, NSO believes that the process for employment and residency permits after graduation must be simplified. It will be of benefit to the labour market in Norway to be able to choose from and utilise the entire spectrum of competence that is produced each year at higher education institutions.

6.3.4 International offices and international competence

NSO believes that institutions must take responsibility for ensuring that their academic staff, departments and offices possess the competence and capacity to work systematically to increase internationalisation and exchange. In addition, they must be able to assist and accommodate the needs of international students. These units must provide counselling for students who wish to go on exchange, as well as being the first point of contact for international students at the institution. Good, clear co-operation agreements with foreign institutions must be developed, either alone or together with others. Students need to be informed about these.

Furthermore, NSO believes that institutions also have a responsibility to gather and share the experiences of exchange students with prospective exchange students. Feedback from former exchange students indicates that exchange agreements should be revised regularly, to ensure that they maintain a high degree of academic quality.

6.4 The Norwegian Centre for International Co-operation in Education (SIU)

The core activity of SIU is to promote international co-operation throughout the education process. SIU must contribute to spreading good practices and solutions between institutions, assist institutions in their work to improve the quality of internationalisation, and provide expert opinion to help promote open discussion about internationalisation in higher education.

NSO believes that SIU should spread information about exchange both to and from Norway, also for academic staff, to a greater extent than they currently do. They should also teach the sector about internationalisation. SIU should be involved in training board representatives in the sector to a greater degree. They should expand the current source data on mobility, so that international students studying for an entire degree in Norway can be differentiated from other exchange students and foreign citizens who are studying in Norway.

7. STUDENT CO-OPERATION AND SOLIDARITY

Human rights provide basic directives that have significance for higher education and research. This applies especially to the freedom of expression and oppressive regimes' treatment of students and researchers.

The Norwegian government must assist in building-up conventions that protect equal access to higher education, fight against discrimination, and promote democratic participation, freedom of expression, the right to join a union, the protection of culture, and social and economic rights for students and researchers. The foremost of these is the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which must be obeyed. Norwegian universities and university colleges must have ethical guidelines for co-operation with the business sector, industry and foreign institutions, that are in accordance with these goals. Human rights and academic freedom must be promoted when entering into and following-up all formalised co-operation agreements.

7.1 Student involvement

Every country should have well-functioning, independent democratic bodies for students. Students should be represented in all decision-making bodies and relevant advisory bodies. The lack of student participation has a negative impact on study quality, and therefore also the societal interests, of higher education.

Where relevant, Nordic Presidential Meeting (NOM) shall be given observer status at sessions of The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The European Students' Union (ESU) is an important participant in the European civil society and a channel for the students of Norway and other European countries. The Norwegian government should contribute annually to the funding of the ESU.

7.2 The global student voice

It is vital that students are represented in all bodies which directly concern their interests, also on a global basis. A legitimate body which can represent students in international fora, such as the UN, it must therefore be established. This type of body must be founded on democratic and humanitarian values. NSO and the Norwegian government must be at the forefront in establishing this body, and provide the resources that are needed to succeed. Stable forms of funding are also necessary. This body should work to safeguard the interests of students, by furthering students' demands and points-of-view globally.

7.3 Student co-operation

Students have a right to act as agents for change in their communities. Student movements are often the first to engage in battle for reform and development. Co-operation across national borders is important, to spread information and experiences about the efforts for student democracy. This will strengthen and motivate student democracies in countries where the students' involvement and right to join a union are under challenge. Co-operation of this nature gives mutual benefits for those involved, also strengthening the capacity of one's own student movement.

NSO supports the student-run solidarity work of organisations and initiatives that directs focus onto students who are fighting for peace, democracy and human rights.

7.4 Academic freedom

The right to academic freedom and the freedom to participate in public debate must be safeguarded, for both academics and students. Political oppression and attacks on academic freedom damage the quality of, and confidence in, education and research. NSO supports schemes that provide aid to oppressed researchers and students.

7.4.1 Scholars at Risk

The international network, Scholars at Risk, directs the spotlight on the issues of academic freedom and freedom of expression. The most important activity of the network is giving temporary work opportunities to academics who are prevented from carrying out academic work in their home country as a result of threats or censorship. More Norwegian institutions should take in researchers through this network, and should include this work in their strategic plans.

7.4.2 Students at Risk

Students at Risk is a pilot programme which allows students who have been expelled politically to complete their education in Norway. It is important to NSO that students return to their home country when the situation allows it. NSO believes that the programme should be expanded and made permanent.

The lack of English-language study programmes in Norway limits the number of students that this programme can reach. It is the aim of NSO to spread Students At Risk to other Nordic countries, with the long-term goal of establishing the programme at European level.

7.5 Educational aid

Educational aid is the most effective way to offer foreign aid and equalise social differences. Nevertheless, education suffers from the increasing interest in quick and measurable results within the foreign aid sector. Foreign aid must be a long-term investment, used as a means to give more people the opportunity to carry out higher education of a high standard.

Most Norwegian educational aid goes towards basic education. This is important as a part of the UN's goals for sustainability. However, NSO believes that sustainable development cannot be achieved if higher education and research are neglected. The percentage of the Norwegian foreign aid budget that is used for the development of higher education and research environments must be increased, to build strong academic environments in developing countries.

NSO will work to achieve goals for sustainability within education. It is important that higher education has a more central place in this work, especially with regard to equal rights to education, life-long learning, equal opportunity and diversity, and competence for the future.

NSO will work to influence the steering committee of UNESCO's Education for All (EFA).