

## New Perspectives For Learning - Briefing Paper 2

### Student Mobility in Europe

#### Context of the Research

Student mobility and accompanying academic recognition are assumed to be necessary prerequisites for an open and dynamic European educational area that will aid European integration and labour market mobility. However, for students to be mobile they have to have access to higher education and the financial resources to enable them to study abroad.

This research was conducted in five countries – France, Germany, Greece, Sweden and the UK. It explored the relationship between higher education admissions policies and practices at national and university levels and related these to student mobility.

Mobile students have been defined as those who study abroad for either a degree or for a period of time. The mobility can be organised by another body or by the students themselves (self-organised or ‘free-movers’).

#### Key Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn: -

1. National policy relating to student mobility ranged from a focus on inward to a focus on outward mobility:
  - a) In both France and Britain it is focused on inward mobility, especially of non-EU students.
  - b) In Germany, there are also elements of this approach, but outward mobility of German students is promoted as well.
  - c) In Sweden, policy focuses on both outward and inward student mobility and in contrast to France, Britain and Germany, stresses mobility as a means of trying to ensure international understanding and peace.
  - d) Greece has a long history of outwardly mobile students.
2. In Germany, Sweden and the UK the need to recruit ‘free-moving’ students was a factor that affected university policy and practice. In some countries this was to remain viable, whilst in others it was tied in with the university funding mechanisms.

3. Two main strands of specific activities were evident: -

- a) Student mobility agreements - which may be linked with teaching innovations.
- b) Programmes of European/international research.

4. Within these strands, a range of innovations were found: -

- a) Compulsory foreign language elements in courses.
- b) New degree courses/international courses.
- c) A new European dimension introduced into courses.
- d) Language courses in the official language of the country.
- e) Language courses in other languages.
- f) Teaching in languages other than an official language of the country.
- g) Induction/orientation courses for students new to the country.
- h) Ongoing cultural/social programmes throughout the period of study.

- 4. Differing policies at a national level can impact on mobility e.g. Sweden has portable grants and loans, which, in theory means there are more opportunities for Swedish students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds to study abroad than for students from other countries.

5. Three key barriers common to all countries were identified: -

- b) Language.
- c) Finance.
- d) Recognition of qualifications and/or admissions procedures.

7. Other barriers included: -

- a) Cultural/attitudinal barriers.
- b) Concern at an institutional level about quality and standards at institutions in other EU countries.
- c) Different attitudes towards mobility by more and less prestigious institutions.

## Key Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations including possible solutions to the barriers that have been identified: -

- 1. Language – a number of recommendations were made to develop and reinforce language training. Specific recommendations included: -
  - a) The EU adopting a more comprehensive policy concerning foreign language instruction.

- b) At the national level, promoting the teaching of widely spoken EU languages in secondary education.
  - c) At an undergraduate level, EU funding under the Socrates Programme could be used for the development of 'project-based' student exchange schemes directly related to the linguistic preparation of outgoing students in the language of the host country.
  - d) Instruction of at least some core courses in widely spoken European languages would attract incoming students towards institutions where less widely spoken languages prevail.
2. Finance – Various recommendations were made to increase funding for both student scholarships and mobility of teaching staff including providing incentives for the private or voluntary sectors to invest in student mobility; differential incentives to encourage lower income and less prestigious institutions to participate; additional funding to encourage students to high cost areas and more scholarships to facilitate mobility among outgoing and incoming students from lower income families. Other specific recommendations included: -
- a) Developing a fully portable financial support/loan scheme in the EU for students who wish to take a full course in another EU country.
  - b) Consideration of a EU-wide economic compensation scheme for uneven exchange of admissions as happens with the Nordic agreement.
3. Recognition of qualification and/or admissions procedures. Various recommendations were made: -
- a) Better explanation to students of the credit transfer system (ECTS) in operation for Socrates Erasmus exchange programme.
  - b) Revise the university calendars across European universities so that there are more consistent start and end dates for the academic year/semesters/terms.
  - c) Instigate a centralised body for the recognition of modules or courses, with a 'recognition ombudsman' at each university.
  - d) Give all EU higher education institutions the right to accept all the foreign students they want within the total of allowed students.
  - e) Facilitate greater interaction across the EU between those involved in organising exchange programmes and those involved with admissions to ensure greater understanding of issues related to academic standards.
  - f) Involve academics on a regular basis with exchange schemes for course recognition and evaluation.
  - g) Agencies responsible for quality assurance across the EU need to liaise closely with one another. The Sorbonne Declaration provides an ideal context for this to take place.
  - h) Develop a common (regional) educational space as found in the Nordic countries.

5. Other incentives to improve mobility include a 'reward' system for mobility in the careers of teaching staff.

### **Further Information**

Full title of study - "Higher education admissions and student mobility within the EU."  
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[Full report](#), [Abstract](#), [Summary](#), [Partner details](#)

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